THE · LITTLE COLONEL · AT BOARDING · SCHOOL

ANNIE · FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Miss Marion Burnette Fil
Birthday Party 1910
From:- Dorothy Woods
Lucile Simpson
Charlotte Twineha
Catherine Woods
Catherine Parrett

I pity the Baker,
I pity the cook,
I pity the fellow
who steals this book!

THE LITTLE COLONEL AT BOARDING-SCHOOL

(Trade Mark)

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L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

200 Summer Street Boston, Mass.

Marion Fitch

The Little Colonel at Boarding-School

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Big Brother," "Ole Mammy's Torment," "Asa Holmes," etc.

Illustrated by ETHELDRED B. BARRY

This learned I from the shadow of a tree,
Which to and fro did sway upon a wall,
Our shadow selves — our influence — may fall
Where we can never be."

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Published, July, 1903

Thirteenth Impression, March, 1909

TO

All the Girls

WHO, LIKE THE LITTLE COLONEL,

ARE

"STANDING WITH RELUCTANT FEET
WHERE THE BROOK AND RIVER MEET,
WOMANHOOD AND CHILDHOOD SWEET."

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	OFF TO BOARDING-SCHOOL	11
II.	A NEW FRIEND	27
III.	IDA'S SECRET	48
IV.	THE SHADOW CLUB	69
V.	AT THE BEECHES	89
VI.	UNINVITED GUESTS	101
VII.	THE HALLOWE'EN MASQUERADE	123
VIII.	THE PRINCESS OF THE PENDULUM	139
IX.	ONE RAINY AFTERNOON	158
X.	A PLOT	176
XI.	A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING	190
XII.	GHOST OR GIRL	213
XIII.	THE SHADOW CLUB IN DISGRACE	228
XIV.	THE THREE WEAVERS	246
XV.	THANKSGIVING DAY	275
XVI.	CHRISTMAS GREENS AND WATCH-NIGHT EMBERS	287

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"SHE STOOD THERE ON THE PLATFORM, WAVING HER HANDKERCHIEF" (*See page 300*) . *Frontispiece*

"SHE TURNED HER WHITE FINGERS IN THE MOONLIGHT" 61

"'THIS LITTLE KNAVE MUST BE MY PARTNER'" . 130

"SHE COULD HEAR EVERY WORD OF THE CONVERSATION" 167

"HE HELD IT ASIDE FOR THEM BOTH TO PASS THROUGH" 199

"MITTIE SAT UP IN BED, TOO STARTLED TO UTTER A SOUND" 220

"'IT'S LIKE A BIT OF HOME TO SEE YOU AGAIN'" . 283

"MALCOLM, LEANING ON HIS GUN, STOOD WATCHING HER" 293

THE LITTLE COLONEL AT (Trade Mark) BOARDING-SCHOOL

CHAPTER I.

OFF TO BOARDING-SCHOOL

SOMETHING unusual was happening at Locust. Although it was early in September, and the heat and dust of a Kentucky summer still lingered in every corner of Lloydsboro Valley, the great house with its vine-covered pillars was being hastily put in order for winter closing.

Rob Moore, swinging his tennis racket as he sauntered down the avenue under the arching locust-trees, stopped short with a whistle of surprise. The tennis net was down. He had come at the Little Colonel's invitation for a farewell game, as they were both to start to school on the morrow, she in the Valley, and he in town. He could not understand the sudden removal of the net.

Then he noticed that every hammock and garden-chair had disappeared from the lawn. Not even the usual trail of magazines and palm-leaf fans was left on the grass, to show that somebody had been spending a comfortable hour in the shade. Usually at this time in the afternoon there was a flutter of ribbons and white dresses somewhere back among the trees; but the place was deserted now. The wicker tea-table was gone from its corner on the piazza. The rugs and cushions which had filled the cosy corners behind the vines were packed away. The lace curtains were down in the long drawing-room, and, peering through the windows which opened to the floor, he saw a coloured man, busily shrouding the handsome old furniture in linen covers.

"What's the matter, Alec?" asked Rob. "What has become of everybody?"

"Done had bad news from Ole Colonel las' night," answered the man. "Walkah telegraphed from Hot Springs that ole Marse's rheumatiz is wuss, and Mis' Sherman she's gwine down to stay with him awhile, an' the young ladies is gwine to bo'din'-school. We all's fixin' to shet up the place till Chris'mus."

Rob gave another long whistle, shrill and loud.

"Boarding-school!" he exclaimed. "Well, this is the biggest surprise out!"

His whistle was answered from the upper hall by a clear high trill, which had been the Little Colonel's signal for him since the first summer they had played together. Giving the answering call he stepped inside the hall, and standing at the foot of the stairs peered up anxiously at the laughing face leaning over the banister-rail above him.

"Come down, Lloyd, and tell me all about it," he demanded.

"I can't now," she replied, in an important tone, smiling tantalizingly at the tall, broad-shouldered boy who shook his racket at her with a threatening gesture. "Mothah has gone to town, and Mom Beck is packing my trunk. I have to show her what things to put into it. Betty is down there somewhere. She'll take the edge off yoah curiosity. Betty," she called, catching sight of a pink dress whisking through the lower hall, "don't tell Rob what school we are going to. Make him guess."

"All right," answered Betty, with a mischievous light in her brown eyes, as she tossed back her curls and led the way out to the stone steps. "We'll have to sit out here. All the hammocks and porch-chairs are packed away in the attic," she explained,

as she spread out the pink skirt and leaned comfortably back against one of the white pillars.

"Seems to me you've been in a howling hurry with your planning and your packing," said Rob, in an aggrieved tone. "I didn't hear a whisper of all this when I was here yesterday evening."

"The telegram didn't come until after you had gone," answered Betty. "But I think godmother must have been expecting it, for in half an hour her plans were all made, and the packing began early this morning. As Papa Jack's business will keep him away nearly all fall, there was nothing to do but close the house and send Lloyd and me to boarding-school. You can't imagine how busy we've been. We are to leave to-morrow morning."

"So are we," answered Rob. "Oaklea looks nearly as deserted as Locust. I always hate this breaking-up time at the end of every summer."

As he spoke, a delicious odour of hot gingerbread was wafted around the corner of the house from the distant kitchen, and he stopped to look at Betty and smile.

"What does that make you think of?" he asked.

"Of a lovely September afternoon just like this," answered Betty, dreamily, half-closing her eyes and drawing in the fragrance with a slow, deep breath.

"Of long shadows on the lawn and the sunshine flickering down through the locust leaves like gold, just as it is doing now. Of Malcolm MacIntyre sitting over where you are, thrumming on his banjo, and of Keith and you and Lloyd and me all singing 'My Old Kentucky Home.' Is that what it makes you think of?"

"Yes, that and the chase we gave old Aunt Cindy. Wasn't she mad when I made off with that gingerbread! I can hear her old slipper soles yet, flopping down the path after me."

"How long ago that seems," mused Betty, "and yet it's only two years."

"It surely must be longer than that," exclaimed Rob.

"No, don't you remember, it was just after Lloyd's house party, when she was eleven and I was twelve. I went abroad that fall with Cousin Carl and Eugenia, and stayed with them a year. And I've only been living at Locust a year. Now I'm a little over fourteen and Lloyd's thirteen; so that just makes it."

"Thirteen yeahs and foah months exactly, if you're talking about me," said the Little Colonel, coming out on the porch with a plate in her hands. "I smelled the gingahbread, so I told Mom Beck

I'd have to stop for refreshments, and she could finish packing by herself. I've piled everything on the bed that I thought I could possibly need at bo'ding-school, and that's neahly everything I own. One needs so many things going off from home this way. Have some?"

She passed the plate to each one, and then, sitting down on the top step beside it, helped herself to a slice of the hot, spicy cake.

"Oh, Rob, we're going to have *such* larks!" she began. "I've always wanted to go away to school, and have midnight suppahs and do the things you read about in stories. I've heard mothah talk about the funny things that happened at the seminary when she was a girl, till I was simply wild to go there, too. And now it seems too good to be true, that we are really going, and are to have the very same room that she had one term when grandfathah was away from home, and she boahded there in little old Lloydsboro Seminary just as we are going to do. There!" she added, ruefully, clapping her hand over her mouth. "I've gone and told you, and I intended to keep you guessing for an hou'ah. I knew you'd nevah think that we were going to stay right here in the Valley."

"Of course not," answered Rob. "You've been

a day pupil at that old seminary for the last five years, ever since you started to school. I'd naturally suppose that when you packed up all you owned and started off to school you'd at least go out of the sight of your own chimney smoke. I don't see where the fun is coming in. I can't think of anything more stupid. Instead of tearing around the country on horseback after lessons, as you've always done, riding where you please, you'll have to take walks with a gang of other girls with a teacher at the head of the procession. It's great exercise, that, taking steps about an inch long and saying nothing but prunes and prisms."

"Don't you believe that's all!" cried Lloyd. "We'll have to take the walks, of co'se, but think of the time we'll have for basket-ball. We'll be able to play the Anchorage girls by Thanksgiving, and I couldn't have been on the team if I'd been only a day pupil."

"Of course we'll miss the ponies," Betty added. "Godmother tried to make some arrangement with President Wells to let us ride every day; but he said he couldn't make an exception in our case without being accused of partiality. If we came as regular pupils we must conform to the

regular rules, and could not have even the liberties we always had as day pupils."

"Except in one thing," corrected Lloyd. "We can still go to the post-office for our mail, instead of having all our lettahs pass through the principal's hands. Mothah thought it wouldn't be worth while to change the address for just one term, especially as she wants me to forward the mail that comes to our box for Papa Jack. He changes his address so often on these business trips that he couldn't keep notifying the postmistress all the time, so I am to do it."

"Well, I pity *you!*" exclaimed Rob, teasingly, tapping his racket against the toes of his tennis shoes. "Boarding-schools are a bad lot, all that I've ever heard of. Scorched oatmeal and dried apples, with old cats watching at every keyhole! Ugh!"

Both girls laughed at his scowl of disgust, and Betty hastened to say, "But we'll have Aunt Cindy to fall back on if the fare gets too bad. That's the beauty of staying so near home. Mom Beck is to come every Monday to get our clothes to launder, and every Saturday to bring them back and see that we are all right, and you know she'll not let us starve. And there aren't any old cats in this school, Rob. Miss Edith is a dear. The girls fairly love

the ground she walks on, and I'm sure that nobody could be nicer and more motherly than Mrs. Clelling."

"How about Miss Bina McCannister?" asked Rob, with a wry face. "She is cross enough to stop a clock, sober and prim and crabbed, with eyes like a fish. I went up there one day with a note from grandfather to Professor Fowler, and she gave me such a stony glare because I happened to let a door bang, that I had cold shivers down my spine for a week."

"Oh, Rob," laughed Lloyd. "Aren't you ashamed to talk so? Anyhow, Miss McCannister will not bother us, because we are not in any of her classes."

"But she'll take her turn in trotting you out to walk, just the same. Then think what a glad procession that will be. You'll feel like prisoners in a chain-gang."

"Talk all you want to, if it amuses you any," said Lloyd, passing the gingerbread around once more. "It won't keep us from having a good time at bo'ding-school."

"Well, I'm coming out again at Thanksgiving. There's to be a big family reunion at Oaklea this year, and if you've stood the storm and still think

that boarding-school life is funny, I'll stand treat to a five-pound box of Huyler's best. You can let that thought buoy you up through all the hungry hours between that time and this."

"Mercy, Rob, don't throw cold water on all our bright hopes like that," cried Betty, springing up as she heard her name spoken in the hall. "Mom Beck wants me. She is ready to begin packing my trunk."

"I must go in a few minutes," said Rob, "so if you're disappearing now, I'll say good-bye till Thanksgiving."

Betty held out her warm little hand. "Good-bye. 'Be good, sweet child, and let who will be clever,'" she quoted, as Rob gave it an awkward shake.

"Practise what you preach, Grandma Betty," he said, in a severe tone, but his blue eyes were smiling into her brown ones with a softened light in them. She had been a merry little comrade in the summer just gone, and then there was something in the brown eyes that made everybody smile on Betty.

As she turned to go she saw that the last crumb of gingerbread had disappeared, and stooping, picked up the plate. She recognized it as her godmother's pet piece of Delft ware. "I'll take this in before anybody steps in it," she said.

"Thanks," said Lloyd, lazily, without looking around, but she turned to Rob as soon as they were alone. "Betty is always so thoughtful about such things. I wouldn't know how to get along without her now, and to think, when she first came heah to live, I wasn't suah that I wanted her! I had nevah had to divide with anybody befoah, and I was afraid I should be jealous. But nobody could be jealous of Betty. She seems like a real suah enough sistah now, and bo'ding-school will be twice the fun because she can go with me."

"Betty's a brick," agreed Rob, emphatically, "the nicest girl I know, except you, but I can't imagine her planning scrapes. She's too much afraid of hurting somebody's feelings for that."

"She's not planning scrapes. Neithah of us want to do anything really bad. We only want to stir the seminary up a bit, and make it lively. We're growing up so fast that if we don't have some fun soon, it will be too late. In only a few moah yeahs I'll be through school, and then I'll have to be a débutante and settle down to be propah and young ladified. Mom Beck always used to be telling me to 'sit still and be a little lady,' and if there's anything I despised it was that."

"How fast the shadows grow long these after-

noons," said Rob, presently, looking at his watch. "It's nearly time for me to go. Come on down to the measuring-tree. We mustn't forget our good-bye ceremony."

Seven Septembers were marked on the tall locust that they called their measuring-tree. It towered above a rustic seat half-way down the avenue. Lloyd laid one finger on the lowest notch and another on the next mark a few inches above it.

"There wasn't neahly so much difference in our heights when I was five and you six as there is now," she said, with a little sigh. "You're almost as tall as Papa Jack, and I'm only up to yoah shouldah. You're growing away from me so fast, Bobby."

Rob threw back his shoulders complacently. "Daddy says that is why I am so awkward; that my height is too much for a fourteen-year-old boy to manage gracefully. I'll soon be through growing at this rate. Maybe after a couple of years more I'll not have to change the mark on the tree."

"I should certainly hope so," cried Lloyd, "unless you want to be a giant in a side-show. Heah! Measuah me."

She stiffened herself against the trunk of the tree, standing as erect as possible, while he stuck the

blade of his knife into the bark, so close to the top of her head that he almost pinned a lock of the light hair to the tree.

"You've grown a lot too, this last year, Lloyd," he said, looking down at her approvingly.

"Oh, Rob," she cried, with a quick, wistful look upward into his face. "I don't want to grow up. It would be so much nicah if we could stay children always."

"We have had a lot of fun under these old locusts, that's a fact," he admitted, as he began cutting the date opposite the measurements he had just taken. Then he became so absorbed in trying to make the figures neatly that he said nothing more until the task was done.

Lloyd, kneeling on the rustic bench to watch him, was silent also, and for a few minutes the only sound in all the late afternoon sunshine was the soft rustling of the leaves overhead.

"If they could only stay children always!" the locusts were repeating one to another. "Children always! That is the happiest time!" Rob, intent on his carving, never noticed the stirring of the leaves, but the Little Colonel, who in a vague way always seemed to understand the whisperings of these old family sentinels, looked up and listened.

As if she were one of them, she began recalling with them the scenes they had looked upon. How long ago seemed those summer days when she measured up only to the first notch. Mom Beck and Rob's faithful old nurse, Dinah, sat on the bench where she was now kneeling, and watched the two children that the locusts were whispering about, romping up and down the avenue. How well she remembered the little blue shoes she wore, and the jingling of the bells on the gay knitted bridle, as they played horse, with Fritz barking wildly at their heels.

The locusts had watched them in all the playtimes that lay between the first and last of those seven notches, eight it would be when Rob had finished; for it was in their friendly shade they had rolled their hoops and spun their tops and played at marbles and made their kites. Here, too, they had set their target when he taught her to shoot with his air rifle, and up and down in the winter holidays they had passed with their skates over their shoulders, with their sleds dragging after them, or their arms piled high with Christmas greens. Here they had tramped, shoulder to shoulder, whistling like two boys; here they had raced their ponies; here they had strolled and played and sung together,

the strong, deep friendship yearly growing stronger between them, as they yearly cut a higher notch in the bark of the old measuring-tree.

"If they could only stay children always!" whispered the locusts again, with something so like a sigh in the refrain, that Lloyd felt the tears spring to her eyes, she scarcely knew why.

"There," said Rob, closing his knife and slipping it into his pocket. "I must go now."

As usual, Lloyd walked down to the gate with him. He whistled as he went, a musical, rollicking negro chorus, and she joined in with an accompaniment of little trills and calls, in clever imitation of a mocking-bird. But just before they reached the gate her whistling stopped. Her quick eyes spied a four-leafed clover in the grass, and she sprang forward to get it.

"And heah's anothah!" she cried, triumphantly. "One for you too, Rob. That means good luck for both of us. Put it in yoah pocket."

Rob took the little charm she held out, with a skeptical smile, yet he had imbibed too great a belief in such omens from his old coloured nurse not to regard it with respect. "Thanks," he said, "I have a safer place than my pocket. I'll need all the luck this or anything else can bring me in

my Latin this year, so I'll carry it to every recitation." Opening the back of his watch he carefully smoothed the green petals and laid them inside, then closed the case with a snap. "Now I'm fixed," he said, with a nod of satisfaction.

At the gate they did not shake hands, but parted as they had done so many times before, as if they expected to begin their playtime on the morrow.

"Good-bye, Lloyd," was all he said, with a slight lifting of his cap as he walked away.

"Good-bye, Bobby," she answered. She stood for a moment shading her eyes from the sunset, with the hand that held the four-leafed clover, as she watched him go striding down the road toward Oaklea, switching with his tennis racket at the asters and goldenrod along his path. Then she went slowly back to the house, thinking how tall he looked as he strode away. As she passed the measuring-tree she looked up at the old locusts overhead, and sure of their sympathy, said, half-aloud, "Oh, I *wish* we didn't have to grow up!"

CHAPTER II.

A NEW FRIEND

LLOYDSBORO SEMINARY was not an especially attractive place viewed from the outside of the high picket fence, which surrounded its entire domain. The fence itself was forbidding. Its tall pickets, sharp-pointed and close together, seemed to suggest that strict rules were to be found inside; rules like the pickets, too firm and pointed to be easily broken through or climbed over.

The building was old and weather-beaten, but in its prime the school had been one of the best in the State, and many a woman remembered it loyally in after years when she had daughters of her own to educate. So it happened that some of the pupils came long distances, and from many parts of the country, to sit at the same old desks their mothers sat at, to study the same old lessons, and to learn to love every rock and tree on the seminary grounds, because of their associations with all the warm young friendships formed there.

A group of maples and cedars stood between the seminary and the high green picket gate in front, with a score of rustic seats and wooden swings scattered about in their shade. On the east an old neglected apple orchard sloped away from the house, where during the first few weeks of school, hard juicy winesaps, russets, and bellflowers lay in hiding from the hungry schoolgirls, who searched for them in the tall grass, waving knee-deep among the trees. On the other side, the high fence separated the grounds from the closely clipped lawn of Clovercroft, one of the hospitable old homesteads of the Valley, whose wide porches and vine-covered tower made a charming picture from the western windows of the seminary.

The opening day of school was always a sort of gala occasion. No regular work could be done, for pupils were continually coming in on the various trains to be registered and assigned to classes. After chapel exercises the day pupils were at liberty to go home, but it was a time-honoured custom for them to adjourn to the apple orchard, to hold a reunion with all the last year's boarders who had returned.

The swings and seats in front of the seminary were left for the newcomers. Many a longing glance

was cast toward the orchard by the strangers, who, left thus inhospitably alone, made shy advances toward acquaintance among themselves. On the morrow they, too, might be included in the friendly little groups exchanging confidences with their heads close together, and walking with their arms around each other under the gnarly old trees; but that they should be ignored the first day was as binding as the unwritten "laws of the jungle."

From her seat in the swing nearest the house, a new girl watched the others swarming out from chapel, laughing and talking and calling to those ahead to wait. The primary grades went racing through the warm morning sunshine, down to their playhouses by the spring. The seniors and juniors strolled off in opposite directions in dignified exclusiveness, to different parts of the orchard. Each group as it passed attracted the new girl's attention, but her interest centred in a dozen or more girls lingering on the front steps. Their ages seemed to range from twelve to fifteen years. They were evidently waiting for some one.

"Why don't they hurry?" asked an impatient voice. "What's the matter?"

"The matron stopped them," some one answered.

"I heard her asking about some bedding that was to be sent from Locust."

It was nearly five minutes before some one interrupted a discussion that had begun, to call "Here they come!" Then a chorus of calls began most confusing to the girl in the swing, who did not know the names of the newcomers who seemed to be so popular.

"I bid to walk with the Little Colonel!"

"Come on, Elizabeth Lloyd Lewis, I'm waiting for you."

"Hurry up, Betty! I've got something to tell you!"

"Lloyd! Lloyd Sherman! Can't you hear? Is it really true that you are going to board here?"

With the two girls in their midst, trying to explain to a dozen different questioners in the same breath, when and why they had become resident pupils, the noisy procession moved on. Only one was left behind, a pale-faced child in spectacles, who, in spite of all their protests, stood looking after them, insisting she must wait for Sue Bell.

As the others moved away, the new girl beckoned to her with a friendly smile. "You're Janie Clung, aren't you?" she asked, as the little girl advanced

a few steps, and then stood awkwardly rubbing one foot against the other.

"You see I couldn't help hearing your name. They spoke it so often. I am Ida Shane, from Clay County. Won't you sit here in the swing with me until the girl you are waiting for comes out, and tell me something about the school? It's so hard," she added, plaintively, "to be a stranger in a place where everybody else has so many friends. You seem to know every one here. From the way they all begged you to go with them, I imagine you must be very popular."

Much flattered by this last remark from one so much older than herself, Janie climbed into the seat in the swing, opposite the girl from Clay County, and scrutinized her shyly.

Ida Shane was very pretty, she decided. She must be nearly sixteen, or maybe more, for she wore her dresses long and her hair in a soft, fluffy pompadour. Then Janie's gaze wandered from her hair to a bewitching little dimple that came at the corner of Ida's mouth when she smiled, and she thought to herself that the slow, soft drawl in which Ida spoke was exceedingly musical and ladylike. She found herself talking in a lower tone than usual, and quite slowly, when she answered.

"You know, I think it is always best to be very particular in choosing friends when one goes to a new place," Ida remarked, in a confidential tone, which seemed to insinuate that Janie could be safely chosen. "I don't want to take up with everybody. That's why I want you to tell me which are the first families here in the Valley, and which are the girls whose friendship is worth while having."

Simple little Janie, who considered friendship with everybody worth having, looked puzzled.

"Well, for instance, who were those two girls in white duck dresses whom you were all waiting for so long? The one with the lovely long light hair that they called Lloyd and the Little Colonel? Now *she's* aristocratic-looking, and all the girls seem to regard her as a sort of leader. Tell me about her."

"Oh, that's Lloyd Sherman," answered Janie. "I reckon you might say she belongs to one of the first families. She lives in a perfectly beautiful place called Locust. The Valley is named after some of her ancestors, and old Colonel Lloyd is her grandfather. 'Little Colonel' is just one of her nicknames. She's had everything that heart could wish, and has been to Europe. When she came back she brought a magnificent St. Bernard dog with her that

had been trained as a Red Cross war-dog for the ambulance service in the German army. They called him Hero, and he acted in a play they gave here last fall, called the ' Rescue of the Princess Winsome.' I was one of the flower messengers in the play. Lloyd was the Princess. She looked exactly like one that night. The dog saved her life while they were in Switzerland, and when he died the family made as much fuss over him as if he had been a person. He was buried with military honours, and there is a handsome monument over his grave. I'll show it to you sometime, when we walk past Locust."

Janie paused with a long breath. It was more of a speech than she was accustomed to making, but Ida had listened with such flattering attention that it was easier to talk to her than to any one whom she had ever known.

"I thought she was like that," remarked Ida, in an I-told-you-so tone. "I rarely make mistakes in people. Now that other one they call Betty. She has a sweet face."

"I should say she has!" cried Janie, warmly. "She's the dearest girl in school. Everybody loves Betty Lewis. She is Mrs. Sherman's goddaughter, and lives at Locust too. She writes the loveliest poetry. Why, she wrote that whole play of the

Princess Winsome, and every one thought it was wonderful. Mr. Sherman had several copies of it printed and bound in carved leather. He gave one copy to the seminary library, so you can read it if you want to."

"That'll be the first thing I shall draw from the library," said Ida, nodding approvingly at the account of Betty. "Then there's some one else I want to ask about," she continued. "I was told that General Walton's family lives here, and that his daughters go to this school. I don't mind telling you, in confidence, you know, that that is what made my aunt finally decide to send me to this school instead of the one in Frankfort. Were they here this morning?"

"Yes, and they are Lloyd's best friends. Maybe you noticed two girls in pink, with great dark eyes, lovely eyes, who walked off with her, one on each side."

"Yes, I wondered who they were."

"The larger one was Allison and the other one Kitty. They live at The Beeches. We walk past there nearly every day. Once, last year, Miss Edith took some of us in there, and Mrs. Walton showed us all her curios and relics. It is a fascinating place

to visit. There are things from all over the world in every room, and a story about each one."

"How interesting!" smiled Ida, showing a glimpse of her dimple and passing a slim hand, glittering with many rings, over her pompadour. "You can't imagine how entertaining you are, Janie; tell me some more."

With a slight movement of the foot she started the swing to swaying, and, leaning back in the seat with an air of attention, waited for Janie to go on. With such a listener, Janie was in a fair way to tell all she knew, when Sue Bell appeared in the doorway, beckoning to her. She even felt a decided sense of annoyance at the interruption, although Sue Bell was her dearest friend, so much was she enjoying Ida as an audience.

"That new girl is perfectly lovely!" she declared to Sue Bell, as they moved off together. She repeated the opinion so often after she reached the orchard, and had so much to say about Ida Shane's hair and Ida Shane's dimple, and the stacks of rings she had, and the stylish clothes she wore, that some of the girls exchanged amused glances. Kitty Walton remarked in a teasing tone that she believed the new girl must have hoodooed Janie Clung, so that she couldn't do anything but sing her praises.

"You ought to be ashamed to talk that way, Kitty Walton," cried Janie, in angry defence of her new friend, "especially when she said such nice things about your family being celebrities, and that was one reason her aunt sent her to this school, because the daughters of such a famous general were pupils here. And she thinks Lloyd is so aristocratic-looking, and Betty awfully sweet, and so smart to write that play. And she said, even if you all are lots younger than herself, she'd rather have you for her friends than any of the seniors, because she could tell just by looking at you that you belong to the best old families in the place."

"What did she say about the rest of us?" cried Mittie Dupong, mockingly, winking at her nearest neighbour.

Janie, turning in time to see the wink, answered shortly, "Nothing. She doesn't intend to make friends with *everybody*."

It was an indiscreet speech, and the moment it was made she realized that it would be counted against Ida, instead of in her favour, as she had intended it to be. Significant glances passed among those who had not been included in Ida's classification of celebrities or first families, and Mittie Dupong retorted, with a shrug of her shoulders, "Hm!

Miss Shane may find that there are people in the world as particular as herself. Who is *she*, anyway, that she should give herself such airs?"

No one answered the question, but there was sown at that moment in more than one girl's mind a little seed of dislike which took deep root as the days went by. But if Ida's thoughtlessly repeated speech worked her ill in one way, it had an opposite effect with those whose favour she wished most to gain. Allison and Kitty met her with especial friendliness when Janie stopped them at the swing, as they started home at noon. It was pleasant for them to feel that she had been drawn to the school partly on their account. It gave them a sense of importance they had never experienced before.

Lloyd, too, unconsciously influenced by the flattering recollection that she had been singled out from all the others as aristocratic-looking, took especial care to be gracious when she found herself seated across from Ida at the dinner-table. The old pupils had been given their usual places, but Betty and Lloyd were among the newcomers.

"Now I feel for the first time that I'm really away at bo'ding-school," Lloyd said, with a smile, which included Ida in the conversation, as she glanced down the long table, stretched the entire

length of the dining-room. "It seems as if we might be hundreds of miles away from home instead of one. I can hardly believe that we are still in Lloydsboro Valley. Betty, isn't it time for us to begin to feel homesick?"

"Not till dark comes," answered Betty. "Twilight is the regulation time in boarding-school stories."

Lloyd smiled across at Ida. "Do you think you are going to be homesick?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" answered Ida, in her slow, sweet voice. The dimple which had charmed Janie flashed into sight. "This is the fourth boarding-school I have been sent to. I am used to going to new places."

"The fo'th!" exclaimed Lloyd, with surprised emphasis. A curious "Why?" almost slipped off her tongue, but she stopped it politely in the middle, and managed to stammer instead, as she salted her soup, "Wh-what fun you must have had!"

"I have," answered Ida, with a glance toward the end of the table where Miss Bina McCannister sat grim and watchful. "Sometime I'll tell you about some of my adventures."

As the dinner progressed, both Lloyd and Betty felt themselves yielding to the soft charm of manner

which had won little Janie Clung's admiration, and by the time they had finished their dessert they were ready to join in Janie's most enthusiastic praises of the new girl.

"Do you know that my room is in the same wing with yours, just next door?" Ida asked, as they rose from the table. "At least, I think so, for as I came down to dinner I saw some trunks being carried in there, marked E. L. L. and L. S."

"I am so glad!" exclaimed Lloyd. "I wondered who we should have for neighbahs. Betty and I ran up there a few minutes this mawning, but the beds and things mothah wanted us to use hadn't been sent ovah from Locust, and it was so topsy-turvy we didn't stay."

"I came yesterday," said Ida, as the three went up the stairs together, "so I've had time to investigate. I imagine we shall be able to do about as we please. You see, this wing of the house was added several years after the main part was built, so there are four rooms on this floor, nicely cut off by themselves."

She opened the door from the main corridor, and led the way into the narrow side-hall which separated the four rooms from the rest of the house.

"Several nights in the week the three of us

will be here alone," she said. "This tiny room at the end belongs to that queer little Magnolia Budine whom everybody laughed at this morning. She lives near enough the seminary to go home every Friday night and stay till Monday morning. The three Clark sisters have this big room next to hers, and they go home to spend Sundays, too. By the way, wasn't it ridiculous the way Miss McCannister got their names all balled up this morning in the history division, trying to say *Carrie Clark, Clara Clark, Cora Clark?*"

"It was funny," laughed Lloyd. "Kitty Walton whispered to me that they ought to be called the triplets, because every one trips and stuttahs ovah their names. It's as bad as trying to say 'Six slim, slick, silvah saplings.'"

They had reached the third room by this time, the door of which stood open. "This is ours," said Lloyd. "The very same one mothah had one term when she was a girl."

She paused on the threshold, looking around the large, airy apartment, well pleased.

"I wonder if the outside stairway was built when she was here," said Ida. "I discovered it yesterday."

"I nevah heard her say anything about it," said Lloyd. "Where is it?"

"This way," answered Ida, leading them past her own room, which came next, and pushing aside a heavy portière which covered a door at the opposite end of the hall from Magnolia Budine's room.

"The matron told me that a slight fire in the school, one time, led to the building of this extra means of escape, but the girls are forbidden to use the stairs for any other purpose."

"Let's open it," proposed Lloyd, daringly, fumbling with the bolt, which had lain so long unused that it had rusted in its socket. It moved stiffly with a grating sound as she pushed it back. The door swung open on to a small, uncovered landing, from which an open staircase descended to the rear of the kitchen.

"I've often seen these steps from the outside," said Lloyd, "but I didn't know where they led to. No, I nevah heard mothah speak of them. Isn't it fun to have a secret stairway of our own! Why do you suppose they have a curtain ovah the doah?"

"To hide it," said Betty, wisely, "so that the daily sight of it will not put it into our naughty heads to make use of it, and prowl around at nights. They evidently think 'How oft the sight of means

to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done.' So they cover it up."

"That's from Shakespeare, isn't it?" asked Ida. "I'd give anything if I could make appropriate quotations like that, but I never think of the right thing till it's too late. But then, I suppose it comes easy to any one smart enough to write as you do. I am so anxious to read that play of yours, 'The Rescue of the Princess Winsome.' I was told that there is a copy in the library. Your room ought to be called 'Sweet Peas,' since it belongs to a princess and a poetess."

Betty blushed with pleasure. They had bolted the door again and were standing in front of their room, as Ida proposed the name of Sweet Peas.

"It is kind of you to give us such a sweet name for our room," said Lloyd. "Will you come in while we unpack?"

"No, thank you," was the answer. "I have some letters to write before four o'clock. That is the time, I believe, when we all have to turn out together for a walk." She turned away, but came back to ask, hesitatingly, "There's one thing I'd like to ask, Lloyd; do you mind if I call you Princess instead of Lloyd? The Princess Winsome? That name seems to suit you so well. The first

thing I noticed about you was the proud little way you lift your head. You carry yourself like one."

A bright colour swept across Lloyd's face. "Of co'se I don't mind," she said, "and it is deah of you to care to call me that."

When Ida went back to her own room, it was with the comfortable feeling that she had left a very agreeable impression behind her.

"Isn't she a darling!" exclaimed Lloyd, enthusiastically, when she and Betty were alone, with their door closed. "She is pretty and stylish, and certainly has lovely mannahs. Besides, she is as sma'ht as can be, and mighty entahtaining. I've taken a great fancy to her."

"So have I," admitted Betty. "I love to sit and watch her. The least thing she says in that soft, slow way sounds sweet. I am so glad that her room is next to ours."

Mrs. Sherman had advised taking few furnishings to the seminary, but Lloyd insisted that they could not feel that they were really away at boarding-school unless they had all that goes to equip a modern college girl's room. So pictures and posters, sofa-pillows and book-racks were crowded into the overflowing trunks. A chafing-dish, a well-furnished tea-basket, a dainty chocolate-pot, and a mandolin

were brought over in the carriage that took Mrs. Sherman to the depot. Both girls were kept busy until four o'clock, finding places to put their numerous possessions. Neither one realized how far she had passed under the spell of the new pupil, but unconsciously every picture they hung and every article they unpacked was located with a thought of her approval.

Once as Lloyd passed the mirror, when Betty's back was turned, she paused to look at her reflection with the pleased consciousness that Ida had spoken the truth; that she did hold her head proudly and carry herself well. And Betty several times passed her hand up over the brown curls on her forehead, recalling the graceful gesture of the white, heavily ringed hand. While she tacked up posters and put away clothes, she chattered busily with Lloyd, but through her thoughts, like an undercurrent to their conversation, ran a few musical lines suggested by the white hands and low voice. An "Ode to Ida" had already begun to weave itself into shape in her busy little brain.

A few minutes before the gong sounded, summoning the girls to the first of their daily walks, Ida tapped on the door. She had only stopped to ask a question about the rules, she said, and must

run back and put on her hat; but catching sight of a picture of the long avenue at Locust, which hung over Lloyd's bed, she crossed the room to examine it.

"You've made a perfect love of a room with all these handsome things," she said, looking around admiringly. "But" — she scanned the few photographs on the mantel, and the two on the dressing-table in their frames of beaten silver — "it seems so queer, you know. You haven't the picture of a single boy. Didn't you bring any?"

"No!" answered Lloyd, in surprise. "Why should I?"

"But you have some at home, haven't you?" persisted Ida.

"Yes, I have lovely ones of Allison Walton's cousins, Malcolm and Keith MacIntyre, taken in the costumes they wore as 'two little knights of Kentucky.' And I have one of Ranald Walton taken in his captain's uniform, and nearly a dozen of Rob Moore. He's given me one whenevah he's had them taken, from the time he wore kilts and curls."

"My *dear!*" exclaimed Ida. "Why didn't you bring them? They would have been such an addition."

"Because I don't want any boy's pictuah stuck up on my dressing-table. I like to have them, because they've been my playmates always, and when we're grown up I'd like to remembah just how they looked, but that's no reason I want my walls plastahed with them now."

"What an original little thing you are, Princess," exclaimed Ida, with a laugh, which would have nettled Lloyd had not the compliment and the title taken away its sting. "Come into my room and see how my walls are plastered, as you call it."

Lloyd stared around in astonishment when Ida threw open her door. Boyish faces looked back at her from every side. Handsome ones, homely ones, in groups, in pairs, framed and unframed, strung together with ribbons, or stuck in behind Japanese fans. Added to all the other pictures of girls she had known in the three boarding-schools which she had attended, it gave the room the appearance of a photograph gallery.

"Well!" exclaimed Lloyd, at length, after a long, slow survey, "I don't see what you want them for." Unconsciously her head took the haughty uplift which Ida had admired.

"For the same reason that an Indian hangs up all the scalp-locks he takes, I suppose," drawled

Ida, sweetly. "Of course, you're young yet. You don't understand. But you'll look at things differently when you are as near 'sweet sixteen' as I am, Princess."

Again that flattering title took the sting out of the patronizing manner which Lloyd otherwise would have resented. Was it only the afternoon before, she wondered, that she had cried out to the friendly old locusts her longing to be a child always?

As Ida crossed the room with a graceful sweep of long skirts, and settled her hat with its clusters of violets jauntily over her fluffy pompadour, there stole into the Little Colonel's heart, for the first time, a vague desire; a half-defined wish that she, too, were as near the borders of grown-up land as "sweet sixteen."

CHAPTER III.

IDA'S SECRET

"BETTY," said Lloyd, one morning, the third week of school, as she sat on the edge of her bed lacing her shoes, "you know that little glove-case you embroidered for my birthday present; would you feel hurt if I were to give it away?"

"No," answered Betty, slowly, turning from the mirror, brush in hand. "I made it to please you, and if you can find more pleasure in giving it away than in keeping it, I'd be glad for you to give it away."

"Honestly, Betty?"

"Yes, honestly." The brown eyes turned with truthful directness toward Lloyd.

"Oh, you are such a comfortable sort of person to live with, Betty Lewis," exclaimed the Little Colonel, with a sigh of relief. "Most girls would think that I didn't appreciate all those fine stitches you put into it, and didn't care for eithah the gift or the givah if I was willing to part with it; but I was suah

you would undahstand. You see, the violets on it make it such a perfect match for everything on Ida's dressing-table, that it seems as if it ought to belong to her. I can't look at a violet now without thinking of her. She is so much like one, don't you think? Refined and sweet, and her eyes are such a dark blue, and have such a shy, appealing way of looking out from undah those long lashes. And have you evah noticed what delicious sachet she uses? So faint it's not much moah than the whispah of a smell, but there's always a touch of it about everything belonging to her. I call her Violet all the time now."

Only the mirror saw the bored expression that shaded Betty's face for an instant. For the last week, morning, noon, and night, she had heard nothing from Lloyd but Ida's praises. A sudden intimacy had sprung up between the two which threatened to eclipse all Lloyd's other friendships. Betty began brushing her hair vigorously. "Will you promise not to feel hurt if I give you a piece of advice?" she asked.

Lloyd nodded, lazily wondering what was coming, as she reached down to pick up her other shoe. She did not put it on, however, but sat with it in her hand, staring at Betty, scarcely believing that she

heard aright, the advice was so different from anything she had expected.

"Then don't call her Violet before the other girls. And if I were in your place I don't believe I'd talk about her to them, quite as much as you do. You see," she hurried on, noticing the quick flush of displeasure on Lloyd's face, "I don't suppose you realize how much you do talk about her, or how you have changed lately. Last year you were good friends with all the girls, ready for any fun they proposed. They liked that independent, bossy little way you had of deciding things for them. That was one thing that made you so popular. But now you always wait to find out what Ida thinks, and what Ida wants, and they feel that you've not only dropped your old friends for a stranger whom you've known only three weeks, but that in some sort of a way — I can't explain it — you've dropped your old self too. Really, I believe that they are as jealous of the influence she has over you, as of the way she monopolizes you."

Betty did not see the gathering storm in the Little Colonel's face, and went serenely on brushing her hair. "You know she's so much older than you. They always smile so significantly when she calls you Princess, as if they thought she was doing

it to flatter you. While they wouldn't say it openly to me, of course, I've heard them whispering among themselves that Ida had hoodooed you as she had Janie Clung, so that all you live for nowadays is to wait on her and buy her candy and violets."

Bang! went Lloyd's shoe against the wall. She had sent it spinning across the room with all her force. Betty, turning in dismay, saw that the advice which she had given with the kindest of motives, had aroused the Little Colonel's temper to white heat.

"The mean, hateful things!" she cried. "They've no right to talk about Ida that way! The idea of her stooping to such a thing as to flatter any one for what she could get out of them! It's an outrageous —"

"But Lloyd, dear," interrupted Betty. "Listen a minute. You promised that you wouldn't get mad, or I wouldn't have said a word."

"I'm not mad with you, but Mittie Dupong and some of the rest of them have been hateful to Ida from the very first." There was something like a sob in her voice. "And she's so alone in the world, too. She's told me things about her life that almost made me cry. Her aunt doesn't undah-stand her at all, and she has a misa'ble time at home."

"But she needn't feel alone in the world here," insisted Betty. "Every girl in school would have been her friend, if she hadn't said at the start that she didn't care for anybody but us and the Walton girls. They'd be only too glad to take her in, even now, for the sake of having you back again. Oh, it was so much nicer last year."

Lloyd faced her indignantly. "Betty Lewis!" she exclaimed. "You're against her too, or you couldn't say that."

"No, I'm not," insisted Betty. "I like her now just as much as I did the first day I saw her. I think she is sweet and lovable, and I don't wonder that you are very fond of her; but I must say that I'm sorry that she's in the school, for you don't seem to care for anything now but being with her, and that spoils all the good times we had planned to have."

Dead silence followed Betty's speech. The Little Colonel walked across the room, picked up her shoe and put it on, jerking the laces savagely. It was the first time that she had ever been angry with Betty, and her wrath was more than Betty could endure.

"Please don't feel hurt, Lloyd," she begged. "I can't bear to have you angry with me. I wouldn't have said a word, only I thought that if it was

explained to you how we all felt, you'd be willing to spend a little more time with the others, and gradually they'd get interested in Ida and be nice to her for your sake, and things would go on as they used to, when we all had such good times together."

Again the painful silence, so deep that Betty felt as if a wall had risen between them.

"Please, Lloyd," she begged, with tears in her eyes. But Lloyd, with an air of injured dignity, went on dressing, without a word, until the last bow was tied, and the last pin in place.

"And she knew all the time that Ida is my dearest friend," Lloyd kept saying angrily to herself, as she moved about the room. "I could have forgiven her saying mean things about *me,* but for her to stand up and say to my very face that she is sorry Ida is in the school, and that her being here spoils all the good times, when she *knows* what I think of Ida, that is simply a plain insult, and I can nevah feel the same to Betty Lewis again!"

By the time the breakfast-bell rang, both the girls were almost in tears; for the longer Betty's speech rankled in Lloyd's mind the worse it hurt, and the longer the angry silence continued the worse Betty felt.

"It is not like Lloyd to be so unfair," thought Betty. "She's just so blinded by her infatuation for Ida that she can't see my side of the matter at all."

It was on the point of her tongue to speak her thought, but realizing that it would only add fuel to the flame, she checked the impulse, and in the same uncomfortable silence they marched stiffly down the stairs to breakfast.

It was a miserable day for both. To peace-loving Betty it seemed endless. She could hardly keep the tears back when she stood up to recite, and instead of joining the other girls at recess she wandered off with a pencil and note-book. Sitting in one of the swings she wrote some verses about broken friendships that made her cry. They began:

"Dead are the snowy daisies!
Dead are the flowers of May!
The winds are hoarse and voiceless,
The skies are cold and gray!"

And yet a more gloriously golden October day had never shone in the Valley. The sun on the sumach bushes and sweet gum-trees turned their leaves to a flaming red that the heart of a ruby might have envied, and the dogwood berries, redder than any

rose, glowed like living fire in the depths of the woods.

For the last week Lloyd and Ida had spent every recess together, wandering off by themselves to a far corner of the apple orchard, where the trunk of a fallen tree provided them with a seat, and its twisted branches with a rustic screen; but this day when Lloyd needed sympathy and companionship more than on any other, it was suddenly denied her.

Ida had a worried, absent-minded air when she came out at recess after the distribution of the morning mail. She came up to Lloyd in the hall with a grave face. "I am in trouble, Princess," she said, in a low tone. "I'll explain sometime before long, but I must go to my room now. I have an important letter to write."

With heavy forebodings Lloyd wandered back to her desk and sat looking listlessly out of the open window. She could hear laughter and merry voices in conversation outside. Nuts rattled down from the old hickory-tree by the well, and an odour of wild grapes floated in from the vine that trailed over it, where some belated bunches hung too high for any fingers but the frost's to touch. She took no interest in anything.

The afternoon recess passed in the same way.

Miss Bina McCannister led the procession when they went for their afternoon walk. Ida had been excused from joining them, so Lloyd walked beside Janie Clung, in stony silence. Betty was in front of them, and Lloyd, almost stepping on her heels, could think of nothing but the remark that had changed her whole day to gall and wormwood. She resented it doubly, now that poor Ida was in some mysterious trouble.

Betty occasionally cast an anxious glance backward. "She'll surely make up before the sun goes down," she thought. But the sun went down as they strolled homeward, the moon came up, and lights twinkled from all the seminary windows. The supper-bell rang, and a horde of hungry girls poured into the dining-room, but through all the cheerful clatter of dishes and hum of voices, Lloyd kept her dignified silence toward Betty unbroken. Ida had evidently been crying, and had little to say. She left the table before the others were through.

When Betty went to her room for the study hour, she found Lloyd sitting with her elbows on the table before the lamp, seemingly so absorbed in her history lesson that she did not notice the opening of the door. With a sigh Betty sank into a chair on the opposite side of the table, and drew

her arithmetic toward her, but she could not fix her mind on the next day's problems. She was rehearsing a dozen different ways in which to open a conversation, and trying to screw her courage to the point of beginning.

While she hesitated there was a slight tap at the door and Miss Edith looked in. It was her evening to make the round of inspection. Seeing both girls apparently absorbed in their books, she closed the door and passed on. Five minutes went by, in which Betty kept glancing at Lloyd, almost on the point of speaking. There was another tap at the door, and before either could call Come, Ida opened it and beckoned. With an answering nod as if she understood, Lloyd gathered up her books and joined her in the hall. There was a whispered consultation, then Betty heard them go into Ida's room and close the door.

Feeling that the breach between them was growing wider every hour, and that Lloyd never intended to be friendly with her again, Betty laid her head down on her arms and began to cry. Not since she had lain ill and neglected in the bare little room at the Cuckoo's Nest, the time she had the fever, had she felt so miserable and lonely. Not once in all the time since she had been at Locust

had she cried like that, with choking sobs that shook her whole body, and seemed to come from the depths of her poor little aching heart.

She was crying so bitterly that she did not hear Ida's door open again or light footsteps go cautiously down to the end of the hall. Somebody slowly and carefully slipped back the bolt that barred the door leading to the outside stairway. Then the knob turned, and two muffled figures stood outside in the moonlight.

"Hurry!" whispered Ida, catching Lloyd by the hand. Like two shadows they tiptoed down the stairs and across a little open space in the rear of the kitchen, till they reached the cover of heavier shadows, under the protecting trees. Then they ran on as if pursued, keeping close to the high picket fence.

Down in the old apple orchard, in the far corner where the fallen tree lay, they stopped at last, and Ida dropped breathlessly to a seat on the log, and leaned back among the twisted branches.

"There!" she exclaimed, throwing off the heavy golf-cape in which she had muffled herself. "Now I can breathe. Oh, I've been so upset all day, Princess. I felt as if I should choke if I stayed in that old building another minute. Besides, walls do

have ears sometimes, and I wouldn't have anybody find out what I am going to tell you for worlds! It would get me into no end of trouble, and aunt would take me out of school again."

She paused a moment, and Lloyd, waiting expectantly, felt the witchery of the moonlighted night stealing over her. She had been Ida's confidante often of late. She knew the history of each friendship represented by each boy's photograph in Ida's collection, and she had found them all interesting, even when told in prosaic daylight. Beyond the shadowy old orchard a row of yellow-leaved maples gleamed a ghostly silver in the moonlight, and from the direction of Clovercroft stole the music of a violin. Some one was playing Schubert's Serenade. It stirred her strangely.

"Will you promise that you'll never tell a living, breathing soul?" asked Ida, finally, in a low voice.

"Of co'se I wouldn't tell," said Lloyd. "You know that perfectly well, Violet."

"Well, *I'm engaged.*"

"You're what?" exclaimed Lloyd, with such a start of astonishment that she nearly slipped off the log.

"Sh!" whispered Ida. "Somebody'll hear us if you talk so loud."

Feeling as if a chapter of some thrilling romance had suddenly opened before her, Lloyd sat up straight, waiting for the heroine to speak again. The moonlight gave Ida's face an almost unearthly whiteness, and there were dark shadows under her eyes. She had been crying.

"Aunt never wanted me to have anything to do with Edwardo," she began, in a low tone. "That isn't his real name, but I always call him that. She took me out of the Lexington school because he lived near there. She thought that sending me down here would put an end to our correspondence, but it didn't, of course. We kept on corresponding, just the same. Some way she has found it out. She doesn't know that we are engaged. I don't know what she would be tempted to do if she knew. She is angry enough just about the letters. I had one from her this morning, and I saw one on the table addressed to President Wells, in her handwriting. There is no mistaking it. I am sure she has written to him to watch my mail and intercept his letters. I wouldn't have her get hold of them for anything, because she scorns anything like sentiment. She seems to think it is something wicked for young people to care for each other, and Ed-

"SHE TURNED HER WHITE FINGERS IN THE MOONLIGHT."

wardo's letters simply *breathe* devotion in every word."

The faint strains of the distant violin swelled louder as Ida held out her hand from which she had taken all the rings but one. She turned her white fingers in the moonlight, to show the glimmer of a pearl.

"He has told me so many times that that is what my life seems like to him," she said, with a sob in her voice, "— a pearl. I know he has been awfully wild and fast, but when he tells me that only my influence over him can make him the man I want him to be, and that if it were not for my love and prayers he wouldn't care what became of him, or what he did, do you blame me for disregarding aunt's wishes? Don't you think it is cruel of her to interfere?"

Lloyd, listening with breathless interest to the friend whom she loved with all a little girl's adoring enthusiasm for an older one whom she has taken as her model, gave a passionate assent.

"Oh, I knew you'd feel that way about it," said Ida, reaching out to clasp Lloyd's hand with the white one on which glimmered the pearl. "It is *so* good to have some one to talk to who can understand and sympathize."

An eloquent silence fell between them, broken only by the rustle of the dead leaves and the wailing voice of the violin, repeating its plaintive refrain like a human cry. The music and the witchery of the moonlight laid an ever-deepening spell on the listening child, till she felt that she was part of some old tale in which Ida was the ladye fair, and Edwardo the most interesting of heroes, held apart by a cruel fate. She drank in every word eagerly, seeing in her imagination a tall, handsome man with a haughty, dark face, who stood with outstretched hands, murmuring, "Oh, my Pearl, you can make of my life what you will!"

When Ida took a tiny locket from a chain around her neck and opened it to show her his picture, Lloyd felt a distinct twinge of disappointment. It was not at all like the face she had pictured. But Ida explained that it was not a good likeness, only a head cut from a group picture in which he had been taken with the members of his football team. She had a fine photograph of him in her trunk, but had to keep it hidden, not knowing what day her aunt might swoop down upon her for a visit of inspection.

"Seems to me as if I had seen that face befoah somewhere," said the Little Colonel, studying it

intently in the dim light. There was a familiarity about it that puzzled her.

Ida slipped the locket back and gathered up her cape about her. "We won't dare stay here much longer," she said. Then she hesitated. "Princess, I have told you all this because I need your help and am going to ask a great favour of you. Your mail doesn't have to go through the principal's hands. Will you be willing to let Edwardo address my letters to you? It couldn't do you any harm, simply to take them from the post-office box and hand them to me, and it would make a world of difference to me — and to him," she added, softly. "If I were to refuse to let him write to me, as aunt wants me to do, and were to break off our engagement, I think it would make him so reckless that he would do something desperate. Knowing that, I feel so responsible for him. Princess, I'd give my life to keep him straight."

As Ida rose in her earnestness, the tears glistening in her eyes, she seemed to Lloyd like some fair guardian angel, and from that moment she was set apart in her imagination as if she had been a saint on a pedestal. With such a noble example of devotion to one in need, it seemed a very small thing

for Lloyd to consent to the favour she asked, and she gave her promise gladly.

"I shall do everything I can to keep any one from suspecting that he is sending letters to me through you," said Ida, as they strolled slowly back toward the house. "I can't let your friendship for me get you into trouble. They'll watch me very closely now, so maybe it will be as well for me not to appear so intimate with you as I have been. We'll not come off here alone any more at recess. By and by, when I feel that I can, I'll try to interest myself in the other girls. We'll still have our little confidential meetings just the same, but no one must suspect us.

"I wish Mrs. Walton would invite me to her house sometimes," she said, impulsively, when they had walked a few minutes in silence. "If I could fill up a long letter to aunt about that, it would make her feel that I was interested in something besides Edwardo, and would appease her wonderfully."

"I'll ask her to," said Lloyd, eagerly. "Mrs. Walton told mothah she intended to have Betty and me at The Beeches very often while she was away. The first time she invites us I'll ask her to have you too. She's so kind and sweet, that I'd as soon

do it as not. All she seems to live for is just to make othah people happy."

"Oh, Princess, if you only would!" exclaimed Ida, giving her a delighted hug. "Aunt would be so pleased, for it would be in all the home papers that I had been entertained at the home of the late General Walton. She would consider it such an honour, and feel that in one way, at least, I was a credit to her. Aunt thinks so much of attentions from distinguished people. It is one of her hobbies. I would like to please her as much as possible in every way I can, as long as I have to disregard her wishes about — what I just told you, you know. Sh! We're too near the house to talk any more."

The rest of the way they slipped along in silence under the shadow of the trees. Up the creaking stairway they crept, pausing a moment before they opened the door. Then they shot the rusty bolt noiselessly back in place, dropped the portière, and listened again.

"It's all right," whispered Ida, giving Lloyd's hand a reassuring squeeze as they tiptoed down the hall. "Oh, you're *such* a comfort! You'll never know what a load you've taken off my mind. Good night!"

In those few moments of silence between the

orchard and the house, Lloyd's thoughts travelled rapidly. Her quarrel with Betty had faded so far into the background, that it seemed ridiculously trivial now. She had forgotten her grievance in listening to the tale of larger trouble. And since Ida had made it clear to her that it would be to her interest to be friendly with all the girls, she was eager to enlist Betty's sympathies and help. She wished fervently that she could share her secret with her. She burst into the room, her eyes shining with excitement, and blinking as they met the bright lamplight.

Betty was standing in her nightgown, ready for bed. She saw at the first glance that Lloyd's anger was over, and she drew a great sigh of relief.

"Oh, Betty," began Lloyd, impetuously, "I'm awfully sorry I made such a mountain out of a mole-hill this mawning and got into a tempah about what you said. You were right, aftah all. Ida thinks just as you do, that we oughtn't to go off by ourselves all the time, and she wants to be friends with the othah girls if they'll let her. I'm going back to the old ways to-morrow, and try not to let anything spoil the good times you talked about. Ida is so unhappy. I wish I could tell you, but I haven't any right — what she told me was in

confidence. But if you only knew, you'd do all you could to help make it easiah for her with the girls."

"I'll do anything on earth you want me to!" exclaimed Betty. "This has been the longest, miserablest day I ever spent."

"Oh," cried the Little Colonel, a look of distress in her face. "Then I've spoiled 'The Road of the Loving Heart' that I wanted to leave in yoah memory. I haven't been true to my ring." She looked down at the talisman on her finger, the little lover's knot of gold, and turned it around regretfully.

"No, you haven't spoiled anything!" cried Betty. "It was my fault too. You're the dearest girl in the world, and I'll always think of you that way. Let's don't say another word about to-day. That's the best way to forget."

Lloyd began undressing, and Betty knelt down to say her prayers. The gong rang presently for all lights to be put out. The seminary settled itself to silence, then to sleep. But long after Betty's soft, regular breathing showed that she was in dreamland, Lloyd lay with wide-open, wakeful eyes. The moonlight streaming through the open window lay in a white square on the floor by her bed. She heard the clock in the hall toll eleven, twelve, and one

before she fell asleep. The spell of the orchard was still upon her; the moonlight, the faint strains of music, Ida's white face with the tears in the violet eyes, and the glimmer of the pearl on her white hand came again and again in her fitful dreams, all through the night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW CLUB

Lloyd's return to the old ways came about so naturally next morning, that no one seemed to notice her sudden desertion of Ida. Just after the morning recess began, little Elise Walton came running up to Allison, crying excitedly, "Oh, sister! Give me your handkerchief! Quick! Somebody has upset a bottle of ink on Magnolia Budine's hair, and it's running all over everything!"

Before Allison could fish her handkerchief from her sleeve, where she had thrust it during recitation, Lloyd seized a basin of water and hurried out to the back hall door. There stood Magnolia, her head craned forward like a turtle, as far as possible over the steps, to keep the ink from dripping on her dress. Half a dozen little girls were making excited passes at it with handkerchiefs, slate-rags, and sponges.

"Heah!" cried Lloyd, putting the basin down on the step. "Bend ovah, Magnolia, and dip yoah head in! Anna Louise, you run and get anothah

basin in the hall, and Marguerite, ask some of the big girls to bring a bucket of watah. It'll take a tubful to soak this out."

Whatever the Little Colonel undertook was thoroughly done, and when Magnolia emerged from the last vigorous rinsing, only a faint green tinge remained on the flaxen hair. But that would not wash off, Lloyd declared. She had had a similar experience herself when she was in the primary grade. It would simply have to wear off, and that process might take days.

Kitty and Allison with all the girls of their set had crowded around to see the amusing sight, offering advice and laughing all the time the performance lasted. As she worked Lloyd related her own experience. Rob Moore had tipped the bottle of ink on her head one day, when they were writing letters to Santa Claus, and Mom Beck had washed her hair every day for a week to get it out.

Finally, turning her charge over to the primary girls with a couple of towels and directions to rub her dry and leave her in the sun to bleach, Lloyd led the way to the swing, where they sat laughing and joking over Magnolia's accident until the bell rang again.

The school had laughed at Magnolia from the

first day, when an old carryall stopped in front of the seminary and she climbed out with a huge carpet-bag in her hand. It was the most old-fashioned of carpet-bags, an elaborate pattern of red roses on each side. And she was the most old-fashioned of little girls, buttoned up in a plain-waisted bright blue merino dress, with many gathers in the full skirt. It was such a dress as her grandmother might have worn when she was a child. Her light hair was drawn back tightly behind her ears, and braided in two little tails. She was fat and awkward and shy, and so awed by the strange surroundings that a sort of terror took possession of her when she found herself alone among so many unfamiliar faces.

It was Lloyd Sherman who came to the rescue when she saw tears of fright in the round, blue eyes. Lloyd had begun the school term with a resolution to keep true to the talisman she wore, the little ring that was to remind her constantly of the "Road of the Loving Heart" which she wanted to build in every one's memory. This was her first opportunity. She led the little stranger to the principal's room, and stayed beside her until she was delivered safely into the matron's hands. Later it was Lloyd who saw her in chapel looking around in bewilder-

ment, uncertain where to go, and beckoned her to a seat near her own. And again at roll-call, when somebody tittered at the unusual name, and the child's face was all afire with embarrassment, Lloyd's friendly smile flashed across to her was like a rope thrown to a drowning man, and she could never forget to be grateful for it.

As she was in the primary department, she could only worship Lloyd from afar during the day, but as rooms were assigned irrespective of classes, and hers was in the same wing and on the same floor with Lloyd's, she often left her door ajar in the evening, in the hope of seeing her pass, or hearing her voice in the hall. Once she heard Ida call her Princess. The name struck her fancy, and as *"The Princess"* Lloyd was henceforth enshrined in her adoring little heart. Lloyd often caught her admiring glances in chapel, and several times found little offerings in her desk on Monday mornings, when the old carryall came back from the Budine farm with the little girl and the huge carpet-bag.

There was an enormous red apple one time, polished to the highest degree of shininess; several ears of pop-corn at another, and once a stiff little bunch of magenta zinnias and yellow chrysanthe-

mums. There was never any name left with them. Lloyd guessed the giver, but she did not realize what a large place she occupied in Magnolia's affections, or how the child choked with embarrassment till she almost swallowed her chewing-gum, whenever Lloyd chanced to meet her in the hall with a friendly good morning.

"Let's go down to the playhouses and see if the green is bleaching out of Magnolia's hair," proposed Lloyd at the afternoon recess, with all her old-time heartiness; and again the girls forgot to wonder why she stayed with them instead of wandering off with Ida to the orchard.

Just as they reached the spring a shout went up from the circle of little girls gathered around Magnolia. She was facing them defiantly, her fat little face red with mortification.

"What's the matter, Elise?" asked Allison, in a big-sister tone. "Why are you all teasing Magnolia?"

"I'm not teasing her," cried Elise, indignantly. "I told her just now not to mind anything they said, and I'd lend her my paper-doll bride to play with till next Friday afternoon."

"She said that she learned to read in a graveyard, off of the tombstones." giggled Anna Louise,

"and it seemed so funny that we couldn't help laughing."

Magnolia hung her head, twisting a corner of her apron in her fat little fingers, and wishing that the earth would open and swallow her. She had seen the amusement in the Little Colonel's face, and it hurt worse than the ridicule of all the others combined. She felt that she must die of shame.

"That's nothing to laugh at," said Betty, seeing the distress in her face, and divining what the child was suffering. "I used to have lovely times in the old graveyard at the Cuckoo's Nest. Don't you remember how peaceful and sweet it was, Lloyd?" she asked, turning to the Little Colonel, who nodded assent. "Davy and I used to walk up there every afternoon in summer to smell the pinks and the lilies, and read what was carved on the old stones. And we'd sit there in the grass and listen to the redbirds in the cedars, and make up stories about all the people lying there asleep. And Davy learned most of his letters there."

"That's the way it was at Loretta, wasn't it, Maggie!" exclaimed Elise, encouragingly. "Tell them about it."

But Maggie hung her head and twisted the toes

of her stubby shoes around in the dust, unable to say a word.

"I'll tell them, then," said Elise, turning to the larger girls. "They used to live near the convent at Loretta, and one of their neighbours, a girl lots older than Maggie, used to take her up to the graveyard nearly every day. There wasn't any place else to go, you know, and it was lonesome out there in the country. This girl was named Corono, after one of the Sisters who was dead. She had been awfully good to both their families, when they were sick, and Corono and Maggie used to make daisy-chains and crowns out of the honeysuckles and roses, 'cause Corono means crown, and put them on her grave. And every time they would go, Maggie would learn a new letter off one of the tombstones, and after awhile she got so she could read."

"How interesting!" exclaimed Lloyd, all unconscious of the way her words set Maggie's heart to beating with pleasure. Elise turned toward her with a motherly air that seemed very funny considering that she was smaller than the child whom she was championing so valiantly. "I'm going to ask them about that album right now, Maggie. You run back to school and get it."

Glad of any excuse to make her escape, Maggie

started off to the house as fast as her fat little legs would carry her. Deprived of their sport, the smaller girls returned to their playhouses and the older ones strolled leisurely back toward the seminary. Elise tagged along beside Lloyd and Allison.

"Maggie has gone to get her autograph-album," she explained. "It used to be her mother's when she went to school at the convent, but now it's Maggie's. Not more than half the leaves are written on, and her mother said she could use it if she'd be very careful. She wants you girls to write in it. She has had it in her desk for two weeks, trying to get up her courage to ask you, Lloyd, but she was afraid you would laugh. I told her I wasn't afraid. *I'd* ask you. She wants all the big girls to write in it, but she said 'specially *'The Princess.'*"

"The Princess!" echoed Lloyd, in surprise.

"Yes, that's what she calls you all the time. 'Cause you were that in the play, I suppose. She thinks you are the loveliest person she ever saw, and says if she could just look like you and be like you for one day, she'd die happy. And once" — Elise lowered her voice confidentially — "she told me that when she says her prayers every night, she

always prays that some day she'll grow nice enough for you to like her."

"The poor little thing!" cried Lloyd, much touched. "To think of her caring like that! You tell her, Elise, that of co'se we'll all write in it. I shall be glad to."

Elise ran on after Maggie, happy in the accomplishment of her kindly assumed mission, and presently came back with the book which she left in Lloyd's hands.

"Look, girls, what a funny old-fashioned thing it is!" cried Lloyd, turning to Katie Mallard, who with Betty and Kitty were just behind them. All the others came crowding around also.

"Heah is 'Album of the Heart' in gilt lettahs on the back, with such funny plump little cupids sitting in the rose-wreath around it."

"And, oh, see!" cried Betty, glancing over her shoulder at the delicately traced names of the gentle nuns, and the girls who had been playmates of Maggie's mother in a far-away past. "They are all dated over forty years ago."

"Of course," answered Katie. "Nobody is old-fashioned enough nowadays to have an autograph-album. They are *so* old-timey and out of date."

"Wait a minute, please," said Betty, as Lloyd

slowly turned the leaves. "What is that verse signed Sister Corono? Oh, it is an acrostic. See? The initial letters of each line, read downward, spell Martha. That must be Mrs. Budine's name."

Several voices read the verse in unison:

"*M*ay thy life be ever led
*A*long the path of duty,
*R*ich in deeds of helpfulness,
*T*hat fill sad hearts with beauty.
*H*appiness shall then attend thee,
*A*nd all the blessed saints befriend thee."

"Isn't that sweet?" cried Betty. "I'm going to write one for Magnolia. There's something pathetic about that child to me. She looks so wistful sometimes. She's dreadfully odd, but it's mean of the girls to laugh at her."

"I'll do something extra nice, too," said Lloyd. "I can't write poetry, but I'll copy a bar of music from one of the Princess Winsome songs. I think notes look so pretty copied in pen and ink."

"I'll paint a magnolia blossom in water-colours," said Allison, not to be outdone by the others.

"And I — oh, I'll draw a kitten for her to remember my name by," said Kitty, laughing.

As both Allison and Kitty had real talent for drawing, the girls who saw the pages they decorated

were moved to envy; and when Betty added an acrostic on the name Magnolia, nobody had a word of ridicule for the little Album of the Heart, that was serving two generations as a storehouse of sentiment. Betty's verse was passed around the school:

"*M*ay our friendship be as sweet
*A*s the flower whose name you bear.
*G*irlhood days are fleet.
*N*o others are half so fair.
O like a violet pressed,
*L*et my name on this page long dwell,
*I*n after years to recall
A schoolmate who wished you well."

When the girls read that, an autograph-album fever broke out in the school. Every one came to Betty for an acrostic. She spent all her playtime writing them. She ate all her meals struggling inwardly with the hard initials in such names as Pinkie, Ursula, and Vashti. She even dreamed rhymes in her sleep.

Lloyd copied music until her fingers ached, for everybody requested a verse of a Princess Winsome song. Kitty drew whole colonies of kittens, and Allison, finding it impossible to paint a flower typical of each name presented, took to painting a single forget-me-not above her name.

The teachers, too, suffered from the epidemic, and

even people outside the school, until the principal found twenty-three letters in the mail-bag one morning, all addressed to a well-known writer of juvenile stories, whose books were the most popular in the school. An investigation proved that because one girl had received his autograph, twenty-three had followed her example in requesting it, and not one of them had enclosed a stamp; nor had it occurred to them that an author's time is too valuable to spend in answering questions, merely to satisfy the idle curiosity of his readers.

"One stamp is of little value," said the principal, "but multiply it by the hundreds he would have to use in a year in answering the letters of thoughtless strangers, who have no claim on him in any way." Twenty-three girls filed out into the hall after the principal's little talk that followed, and slipped their letters from the mail-bag. Ten of them threw theirs into the waste-basket. The others, who had asked no questions and were more desirous of obtaining their favourite author's autograph, opened theirs to enclose an envelope, stamped and addressed; but few more letters of the kind went out from Lloydsboro Seminary after that.

Kitty, Katie, Allison, Betty, and Lloyd all pounced upon Miss Edith one morning before school, each

with an album in her hand. Miss Edith clutched her hair in mock despair. "These make the seventh dozen I have been asked to write in this week," she declared. "Life is too short to hunt up a different sentiment for each one. I must use the same verse for everybody."

The girls perched on the desks around the rostrum, as she spread out the books before her and began to write. They always loved the few moments they could snatch in Miss Edith's room before school, and felt that her autograph would be one of the most valuable in the collection.

"This is one of my favourite verses," said Miss Edith, as she passed the blotter over the last page, and read it aloud:

> "This learned I from the shadow of a tree
> That to and fro did sway upon the wall:
> Our shadow-selves — our influence — may fall
> Where we can never be."

"I want to tell you a little incident that fastened it in my memory. I have a friend teaching in one of the mountain schools of Kentucky, who told me of two girls who came to the door one day, asking to be admitted as students. Each carried a bundle of clothes wrapped in a newspaper. That was all they had — no money to pay their tuition,

no way of paying their board unless they were allowed to work for it. They had walked forty miles to get to that school. Their home was twice the distance away, but their uncle, who was a tin pedlar, took them half-way in his wagon. They were a week on the road after they left him, where his route branched off from theirs. They stopped at night in some village or farmhouse to which he directed them.

" Nobody had the heart to tell them that there was no room for students who could not pay their way, neither could any one turn away such ambition. But the school was poor. It is kept up by donations from benevolent people, and it was only by great self-sacrifice that the teachers could take them at all.

" The following vacation, while I was at the sea-shore, I had a letter from this friend, and happened to speak of it and the two girls to a wealthy lady whom I met there. She seemed so interested that I read her my friend's letters. They were so full of the struggles and hardships of those mountain people that she was greatly interested and touched, and began corresponding with the principal of the school herself. The outcome of it was that she sent a check for ten thousand dollars to endow scholarships. Of course these two girls were the first

to be benefited by the gift, and next June they will be graduated from the school with honour, fitted to become teachers themselves, far in advance of the time it would have taken had they been obliged to work their way through. Instead of plodding along, using the greater part of their time and strength in laundry work or sewing, they could go on with the college course uninterrupted. They are going to start a school themselves in the mountains, nearer their own home.

"Now that lady never saw those girls, and they were as unconscious that their influence was touching a life a thousand miles away as that tree out yonder, throwing its shadow across on the Clovercroft lawn. They simply stood in their places and reached out as far as they possibly could after what was good and high and worthy in life; but for years and years to come, students who profit by that endowment will be grateful for the shadow cast by those two ambitious girls."

Miss Edith never preached. She did not go on to tell them, as Miss McCannister would have done, that they were responsible not only for the influence of their daily living upon others, but for the effect their shadow-selves might cast on others far beyond their reach. She only pointed to the flaming red

leaves of a gum-tree outside the window, and the shadow swaying partly on the high picket fence, and partly across the Clovercroft lawn, then passed the albums back with a smile. Then the girls filed slowly out to chapel.

It was a warm October day, and as Allison took her seat by an open window in the history class an hour later, she found it hard to fix her thoughts on the old French and Indian wars. It was so much pleasanter to look with dreamy eyes through the haze of the Indian summer, which Mom Beck said was the ghost-smoke from the peace-pipes of old dead and gone chieftains.

She watched the slow fluttering to earth of the pale yellow maple leaves, and listened to the soft rustling of the gorgeous red leaves on the gum-tree to which Miss Edith had pointed. Once or twice she started, recalling her thoughts to the history lesson with an effort as she remembered the girls who were hungry enough for an education to walk forty miles for it and work for their board. She thought vaguely how eagerly they would have improved their opportunities had they been in her place. They would have taken a lively interest in the old wars, instead of sitting in idle day-dreams.

All at once, as Allison watched the swaying of

the gum-tree's shadow on the fence and lawn, a thought came to her that made her seize a pencil and a piece of paper. Writing notes was forbidden in Miss McCannister's classes, but Allison could not wait until recess to share her brilliant thought with Lloyd. With her big eyes fixed innocently on Miss Bina's fishy ones, she scribbled slowly on the paper without once looking down: *"Let's form a Shadow Club, with Miss Edith's verse for a motto. A. W."*

It took much manœuvring to succeed in passing the slip of paper to Lloyd, who sat several seats in front. When it finally reached her she did not dare turn round to nod a pleased assent, but Allison knew that her suggestion was received favourably, for Lloyd's hand at once went up to readjust the bow at the back of her hair, and two fingers wagged violently for an instant out of Miss Bina's sight. Had it been her thumb, Allison would have interpreted the signal to mean no; but from the rapid wagging of the two fingers she knew that Lloyd was much pleased with the idea.

Allison's plan, as she outlined it to Betty, Lloyd, and Kitty at recess, in one of the swings, was to form a club that should be not only fun for themselves, but of some real benefit to the girls of the mountain districts. The Christmas before, the little

circle of Busy Bees, to which Elise belonged, had sent two barrels of clothes and toys to them, under Mrs. Clelling's supervision. She had organized the circle, and was deeply interested in the work. Now Allison proposed that the club should earn money for the same purpose. She grew quite enthusiastic planning the fair they could hold in the spring. "Kitty and I could paint calendars and sachets and paper dolls, you know, Lloyd, and you and Betty could embroider things."

"Katie Mallard crochets the cunningest little doll-caps you ever saw," suggested Kitty. "Of course we'll have her in it."

A warm glow came into the Little Colonel's heart. Here was her chance to do something for Ida. "Let's have just a little bit of a club," she urged; "not more than half a dozen. If we begin to invite generally, it's impossible to draw the line where we can stop. We can't ask all the school, for if we have refreshments, for so many, each meeting will be like giving a big pa'hty. But half a dozen of us could get together whenever we felt like it, and have the cosiest kind of a time with our chafing-dishes, without the rest finding it out. Then nobody would feel hurt."

"Here's four of us to begin with," said Kitty,

"and if we have Katie there's five. Shall you ask Corinne?"

"I wish we could," said Betty, "but that would leave Margery out, and it would never do to ask them and not have Anna Louise and Marguerite. It must be all or none in that crowd."

"I wish you all would be willing to ask Ida," said Lloyd, imploringly. "She does such beautiful leather-work, and that brings better prices than anything we can make."

"I am sure I'm willing," said Betty, cordially.

"I have no objection," said Allison, remembering the pleasant things Ida had said about her, and Kitty, who cared little who was in the club or out of it, so long as she had Katie Mallard, echoed her sister's consent.

"As it is a Shadow Club, we'll keep dark about it," said Kitty. "The girls need never know we've formed one. We ought to meet in the dark to carry out the idea of its name. How would it do to have the haunted house of Hartwell Hollow for our meeting-place?"

"Mercy, no!" exclaimed Lloyd, with a shiver. "That's too spooky, but if you and Allison and Katie can make some excuse to spend the night at

the seminary some time, we'll have a midnight suppah."

"I think we might tell mother and Mrs. Mallard about the club," said Allison. "They can keep a secret, and we'll have lots nicer times and better refreshments if we let them into it."

"Well," agreed Lloyd, "but we mustn't let a single girl find it out. They'd be mad as fiah to be slighted this way. Cross yoah heart and body now, every one of you, that you'll not breathe it to a soul."

Three hands instantly imitated her solemn gesture.

"We'll have the first meeting at The Beeches," said Allison, "because I got up the club. I'll get mother to telephone to the principal to let you and Betty and Ida come over to supper Saturday."

Lloyd danced away to recitation so happy that her face fairly beamed. She managed to spell across to Ida on her fingers that the invitation she had coveted was hers at last.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE BEECHES

"How good it feels to be free!" exclaimed the Little Colonel, as she pushed open the high green picket gate in front of the seminary, and held it ajar for Ida to pass through.

"This is the first time that I have been out on the road without a teachah and a flock of girls, for a whole month. I despise the way we have to line up two by two and go mah'ching through the Valley as if we were pah't of a circus parade, or inmates of an asylum, out for an airing."

Ida laughed as they started down the path, along the road leading to The Beeches. It was one of those perfect days in mid-October when it is easy to laugh; when all outdoors seems filled to the brim with a great content, and even the woods and fields, all autumn-clad, are keeping holiday. Besides it was Saturday afternoon, and they were on their way to their first club meeting.

This was their first appearance together since the

night of their stolen visit to the apple orchard, a week ago. It had cost Lloyd many a pang to give up her intimacy with Ida, but she had never shown such unselfishness as she did in this devotion to her friend. Since Ida's interests demanded that she should go off with the other girls no matter how much she longed to stay, she went obediently. Although Ida no longer wore her violets, she kept her room sweet with fresh bunches of them. Although her name was constantly in her thoughts, she rarely mentioned it, even to Betty. A few whispered words in the hall, an adoring glance toward her now and then at the table, was all she could snatch in the daytime. She even allowed the school to surmise what it pleased; that Ida had quarrelled with her or had grown tired of her; for her love was of the kind that "endureth all things." But every night she lay awake, living over that scene in the moonlit orchard, happy in the consciousness that she was making Ida happy, and dreaming of the romance that she was helping on its way.

Betty had hurried on up the road to call by for Katie Mallard, with the agreement that the couple which reached the post-office first should wait there for the other.

"Let's cut through Clovercroft," suggested Lloyd.

"Mrs. Marks won't care, and it is much shortah that way. The path below her ice-house will bring us out at her woodland gate, just across the road from the depot."

"Anything to get to the post-office first," agreed Ida. "I'm sure that there'll be a letter in your box for me to-day. I can just *feel* that there's one there."

From the depot it was but a few steps to the post-office. One had only to cross the road, pass the country store, and stroll a short distance along the shady avenue. There it sat by the wayside, a little box of a room, that always made Lloyd think of a dove-cote; for the first time she had been taken there her grandfather had explained that all the little square places where Miss Mattie was putting the letters were pigeonholes. Presently when Miss Mattie opened the window and handed him a letter from one of those places, she cried out with a little squeal of delight which made every one smile, "Oh, white pigeon wing flied out fo' you, grandfathah!"

Afterward it grew to be a byword that they always used between themselves, when one carried home a letter for the other. "Pigeon wing for grandpa's baby," he would call fondly, even when she had

grown to be a tall girl; and "White pigeon wing flied out fo' you, grandfathah deah," was the cry if she were the bearer of the missive.

From the post-office door, looking across the road to a grassy ridge beyond, one could see the big inn that the year before had been turned into a home for old Confederate soldiers. Farther on was the wide green slope of the churchyard, and the little stone church with its ivy-covered belfry. The manse stood just behind it. Next to that was the cottage with the high green gables and diamond-shaped window-panes, where the Waltons had lived one summer while their new house was being built. And next to the cottage was the new house itself, set away back in the great grove of trees which gave to the place the name of "The Beeches."

Ida stood outside the door while Lloyd went in for the mail. She was afraid that Miss Mattie might suspect that she had an interest in the letters if she went in too, so she busied herself in looking for four-leaf clovers along the path. She could not have seen one, however, had they been growing on every grass-blade, she was in such a nervous flutter of expectancy. When Lloyd came out with two letters in her hand, her face flushed crim-

son at sight of the familiar handwriting on one envelope.

"This is mine," she exclaimed, in a low tone, snatching it eagerly. "Let's sit down here on the step while I read it."

"I'm mighty glad it wasn't the only one," said Lloyd, glancing back over her shoulder to see if Miss Mattie still stood at the delivery-window. Peeping through the glass which covered the partition wall of pigeonholes, Lloyd saw that she had gone back to her desk by the rear window. So she continued, in a low tone:

"Suppose that had been the only letter, and Betty had asked me if I got one?"

"You would have said no, of course," said Ida, looking up from the page, impatient at the interruption. "This is not for you."

"But it is addressed to me," persisted Lloyd. "Suppose Miss Mattie heard me say no to such a question, or that Betty saw me take it out of the box?"

Again Ida looked up impatiently, but seeing the distressed expression of Lloyd's face, said, soothingly, "I know what you are thinking, Princess. It has just occurred to you that your helping me to carry on this correspondence under cover of your

name seems a little bit underhanded. But if you could just read this letter you'd never be troubled by such a thought again. It makes me feel that I am carrying out the motto of our club in the very highest way possible.

"'Our shadow-selves — our influence — may fall
Where we can never be.'"

she quoted, softly, looking dreamily away toward the ivy-grown belfry.

"I cannot be with Edwardo, but at least half of this letter is taken up with telling me how much my letters have helped and influenced him. That the thought of me off here, true to him in spite of all that has been done to separate us, is keeping him straight as nothing else could do. Somehow it seems a good omen for the club that I should get such a letter on my way to the first meeting."

Ida's manner was convincing, and Lloyd's face brightened as she listened, but she breathed more freely when she saw the envelope bearing her name torn into little bits too small to tell tales, and dropped down the crack behind the doorstep.

Betty and Katie joined them presently, and two by two they rustled along through the fallen leaves which filled the path, to The Beeches. Long before

three o'clock the six members of the Shadow Club were assembled around the big table in the dining-room, with their materials spread out for Mrs. Walton's inspection. Piles of brightly coloured tissue-paper, embroidery silks, zephyr, and ribbon, made a gay showing. Mrs. Walton entered into their plans for the fair enthusiastically, as she helped wind a skein of Iceland wool for Katie's crocheting.

"The beauty of this club," remarked Kitty, as she opened her paint-box and carefully selected a brush, "is that there's no fuss and feathers about it. No election of officers, no dues, no rules, no tiresome minutes to read. All we have to do when we begin is to begin."

"And to remember our motto," suggested Betty, to whom the purpose of the club appealed strongly.

"Ida has made something to help us do that," said Lloyd. "Give them to us now, Ida, while Mrs. Walton is here to see them, please," she urged.

Ida, who had delayed showing them for that very reason, glanced shyly toward her hostess, and then hesitatingly opened the case which held her pyrography outfit.

"It's only some little blotting-pads for your writing-desks," she said, with a blush. "It seems to me that the verse is especially appropriate at

letter-writing time, when we consciously cast our shadow-selves where we cannot be."

There was a chorus of delighted exclamations as she passed the packages around. Only two narrow slips of white blotting-paper held together by a white silken cord, but the cover was of soft gray kid, on which she had burned with her pyrography needle the club's motto in old English letters. Mrs. Walton leaned over the table to read the one on Allison's:

> "This learned I from the shadow of a tree
> That to and fro did sway upon a wall,
> Our shadow-selves — our influence — may fall
> Where we can never be."

"It is beautifully done, my dear," she exclaimed, smiling down into the shy violet eyes raised gratefully to hers in acknowledgment of her lavish praise. "The club is certainly to be congratulated on having a member who can not only make such pretty things, but who can think of such sweet, suggestive ways in which to keep its purpose always in view."

Lloyd's hand, groping along under the table, found Ida's and gave it a squeeze of sympathetic delight.

"There's something to write to your aunt," she whispered. While the girls were still admiring their

blotters, the maid came in to announce a visitor for Mrs. Walton in the library.

Several minutes after she had left them to themselves, Kitty exclaimed, "Oh, mamma forgot to give me those little brass clamps to fasten the candle-shades, and now she has company, and I haven't the faintest idea where to look for them."

"They may be in the hat-rack drawer in the hall," suggested Allison. "I think I saw them in there this morning, but I am not sure."

Kitty skipped out of the room to look for them, and a few minutes later came back, her black eyes shining teasingly.

"I have a trade-last for you, Ida," she said. "Mrs. Mallard is in the library, discussing our club, and I heard mother say something awfully nice about you."

"Tell it!" demanded Lloyd.

"No, I said a trade-last."

"Oh, fishing for a compliment!" sang Katie. "Don't tell her, Ida, even if you have heard one. It will make her vain."

"Besides," put in Allison, "Miss Bina McCannister said it was common and silly to play trade-last."

"Oh, bother old Miss Bina!" said the disrespectful Kitty. "Well, I'll tell you, anyhow. I heard

mother tell Mrs. Mallard that she thought you were a charming girl, one of the sweetest that she had met in a long time. She said she was glad we had chosen you in the club instead of a younger girl, for she thought you would have a quieting, refining influence on us, especially *me!* Think of that now! Me! And she said on that account she would like to have you here often."

Again Lloyd's hand met Ida's under the table in a quick squeeze. "Something else to write to your aunt," she whispered.

Several pretty candle-shades, two doll tam-o'-shanter caps, and three calendars in water-colours were laid aside finished, as the result of that afternoon's work. Besides, Lloyd and Betty had each made considerable progress on the centrepieces they had undertaken to embroider, and the magazine-cover Ida was burning in an elaborate design of dragons was half-done. Allison packed the finished articles away in a hat-box after supper, and put them up on a shelf in her closet.

"Our first meeting has surely been a success," she exclaimed. "At this rate we'll have enough things made by Easter to hold a splendid big fair. We ought to be able to cast our shadows quite

a distance with the money we'll make, if we do this well every time."

"Come cast your shadows on this sheet, girls," called Mrs. Walton from the next room, where she had pinned some strips of white paper to a sheet hung on the wall, and placed a lamp at the proper distance for making silhouettes. "The name of your club suggested an old amusement of ours. Come, see how clever you are at drawing each other's shadows."

It proved to be an amusing undertaking, for whenever they laughed during the process, it changed their profiles into all sorts of ridiculous outlines. But finally some very creditable silhouettes were made, and each member of the club carried home her own shadow as a souvenir of the first meeting.

Katie's father called for her at half-past eight, and escorted the seminary girls as far as the high green gate.

"What a perfectly lovely time we've had!" exclaimed Betty, as she and Lloyd and Ida strolled slowly on toward the house, when they had bidden Katie and Mr. Mallard good night.

"And what a delicious suppah we had!" sighed Lloyd. "Oh, if we could only have shaded candles, and pretty silvah, and flowahs at bo'ding-school!

I'm so tiahed of that long bare table. Everything tasted so good to-night. Those deah little beaten biscuit made me homesick. I haven't had any since I left Locust."

"The club is certainly an inspiration to do something and be something worth while," said Betty. "What Mrs. Walton said at supper, and afterward when she was showing us the general's sword, made me feel that way. Somehow, to-night, the world seems so much lovelier to be in than ever it did before; so full of opportunities, when one little person can cast such a tremendously long shadow." She looked back at hers, stretching down the path behind her, in the light from the hall lamp, till it seemed the length of a giant.

They passed on into the house, and up the stairs together. As Betty went ahead to light the lamp in their room, Ida caught Lloyd impetuously around the waist and gave her a grateful hug.

"Oh, Princess," she exclaimed, "I've had such a happy day, and I owe it all to you! If it hadn't been for you I'd have had neither the visit to The Beeches nor Edwardo's letter. You're *such* a comfort!"

CHAPTER VI.

UNINVITED GUESTS

"THIS is the last day of October," announced Betty, one morning, tearing a leaf from the calendar, as was her habit as soon as she finished dressing. "To-night will be Hallowe'en."

"Do you realize," answered Lloyd, "that we have been at school six whole weeks without doing a single thing we had planned? We have been painfully good. Yestahday when I passed the music-room where Professah Steinwig was giving a violin lesson, I heard him say, 'Ach, you must let down der strings when you have feenish playing. If you keep him keyed to von high pitch alway, some day bif! He go break!' That's just the way I feel this morning; that I've been thinking so much about my shadow-self, and the work we've undehtaken for the mountain people, that it's kept me keyed up to too high a pitch of goodness. I've got to let down and get into some sort of mischief, or bif! I'll go break!"

Betty laughed. "Maybe the changes in the atmosphere affect people as well as fiddle-strings, and it is because it's Hallowe'en, and witches are in the air, that you feel so."

It may have been that the faculty were of Betty's opinion, and felt the spell lurking in the atmosphere. Warned by some mysterious "pricking of the thumbs" of coming wickedness, they sought to avert it. It was announced at breakfast that the usual rules would be suspended that night, and that from seven until eleven the resident pupils would be at liberty to observe the customs of Hallowe'en anywhere in the building, and that a spread of nuts, gingerbread, and apples would be furnished in the gymnasium.

"Headed off again!" exclaimed one of the larger girls who sat near Lloyd. "It's good of them to grant us such privileges, but we won't have half the fun that we could have had if they hadn't put us on our honour this way. I had planned to slip out and go over to Julia Ferris's to-night. Some of the cadets from the Lyndon military school are coming up. I wouldn't have hesitated a moment if they had shut down on our having some fun here, but now they've treated us so handsomely, even to furnishing a spread, of course I can't go. Hallow-

e'en is stupid with just a lot of girls — the same old set we've been going with straight along."

"We might have a masquerade," suggested Susie Figgs. "That would make us feel as if we were meeting strangers."

The suggestion ran along the table like wild-fire, and was so enthusiastically received that Susie felt herself a public benefactor, and beamed with importance the rest of the day.

"Oh, what shall *I* go as?" was the despairing question immediately heard in every quarter, for the time was short in which to improvise costumes. The matron was besieged by distracted borrowers with requests for everything, from a blanket for Pocahontas, to a sunshade and watering-pot for "Mistress Mary, quite contrary."

Lloyd's costume cost her little trouble aside from borrowing a horn from one of the children in the neighbourhood; for Mom Beck, coming in with the laundry before school, volunteered her services. In an old chest in the linen-room at Locust were many odds and ends left over from private theatricals and fancy-dress occasions. Mom Beck remembered an old blue velvet skirt that she thought could be made into a suit for Little Boy Blue before night, if Aunt Cindy's daughter would help her with the

knickerbockers, and hurried away to begin, carrying Lloyd's measure and a Zouave jacket belonging to one of her summer suits, for a pattern.

From that same chest came a dress and hat which Mrs. Sherman had worn in a tableau years before as a Dresden shepherdess, which transformed Betty into the prettiest little Bo-Peep that could be imagined.

Allison and Kitty, taking advantage of the relaxed rules, slipped up the stairs before going home after school, to look at the costumes lying spread out on Lloyd's bed.

"I think it's a shame that day pupils can't come, too," said Allison, wrathfully. "We're left out all around, for we're not old enough to be invited to Julia Ferris's party. We were going to have a party at our house, but mother and auntie had to go to town to stay all night. Aunt Elise is entertaining some old army officer's wife. So we can't have any fun."

"Don't you think that for a moment!" exclaimed Kitty. "Mrs. Mallard said that Katie might come and stay all night with us. Mother telephoned to her just before she started to town."

A daring thought popped into Lloyd's mind. "Why don't you come to-night? It's a masquerade.

You could slip in heah to our room befoah they unmask, and nobody would evah find out who you were. It couldn't be moah fortunately arranged. Little Elise is in town with yoah mothah, and you could easily slip away from Barbry and the cook. You could sleep in heah with us, and run home early in the mawning befoah anybody was up. I'll unlock the doah at the head of the outside stairs, and you can sneak in back way while we are at suppah."

"Oh, how I'd love to!" began Allison, "but I'm sure that mother and Mrs. Mallard wouldn't like it, and —"

"Now, Allison," interrupted Kitty, "you know that nobody ever told us *not* to come, did they? It wouldn't be disobeying unless we'd been forbidden."

"All sorts of larks are allowed on Hallowe'en," urged Lloyd. "Not a soul outside of the Shadow Club will know who you are, and it will be such fun to set everybody to guessing who you are and where you've gone, when you suddenly disappear."

"Yes, we'll come," said Kitty, seizing Allison by the waist and dancing her toward the door. "I'll take the blame if there is any. Hurry up, old Grandma Prim, we'll have to hustle. We've barely

time to run home and eat our supper and get dressed and back here before the affair begins."

Kitty's enthusiasm, like an energetic young whirlwind, swept away every objection her sister could offer, and a few minutes later they were on their way home, eagerly discussing with Katie Mallard what costumes they could get ready in an hour.

Lloyd, who had followed them to the head of the stairs, turned back to her room with a naughty thrill of enjoyment. This escapade would add a spice of excitement to the evening, and she already tingled with the anticipation of it. There was a mischievous smile on her face as she walked down the hall. But it disappeared as she caught the muffled sound of some one sobbing. She stood still to listen. It seemed to come from Magnolia Budine's room, the door of which stood ajar.

Since the day that the old autograph-album had been put into her hands, Lloyd had felt a peculiar interest in the child who prayed every night that some day she might "grow nice enough for the Princess to like her." She had showed this interest by many little attentions which kept Magnolia in a flutter of happiness for hours afterward. Although she still coloured with embarrassment to the roots of her flaxen hair when the Princess stooped to

speak to her, she no longer choked and swallowed her chewing-gum. In fact, she no longer chewed, since she noticed that the Princess disdained the habit.

It was Elise who confided this fact to Lloyd, and many other things which not only flattered her vanity, but aroused a real affection for the ardent little soul who showed her admiration by copying her in every way possible.

"She looks up to me as I look up to Ida," thought Lloyd. "I ought to be good to the poor little thing."

As she paused an instant in the hall, wondering whether it would be kinder to go in and offer comfort or to go away showing no sign of having overheard her sobs, it suddenly occurred to her what was the cause of Magnolia's grief. Probably she had no costume for the masquerade. Nothing the huge carpet-bag held could be made into one. There was no one to help her, and she felt left out of the Hallowe'en frolic. Lloyd hesitated no longer. The next moment she was wiping Magnolia's eyes, and restoring her to her usual blushing cheerfulness.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," she said. "We'll run over to Clovercroft, and ask Miss Katherine to lend us something. I have to go, anyhow, to borrow

a horn. Mrs. Marks told me that I could have one that Buddy left there last summah. He's one of her grandchildren. Miss Katherine is an artist. She has a great big camera in her studio, and takes bettah pictuahs than any professional photographah could, because she thinks of all sorts of beautiful things to pose people for. She gets a medal or a prize every time she places a pictuah on exhibition, and I'm suah she can think of something for you to be."

In such a state of rapture that she felt she must be dreaming, Magnolia followed Lloyd down-stairs to ask the principal's permission to go over to Clovercroft.

"I know a place where there are two pickets loose," said Lloyd, as they hurried across the lawn. "If you can squeeze through the fence we'll save time. Every minute is precious now."

Breathless and panting from their run, the children reached the side door just as the coloured man opened it on his way out for an armful of wood.

"Frazer, we want to see Miss Katherine," announced Lloyd, who was enough at home at Clovercroft to know all the servants.

"She's in the music-room, Miss Lloyd," he answered. "You all kin walk right in."

"Is there any company there? We want to see

her alone," said Lloyd, with a dignified air that made Magnolia look at her admiringly.

"No'm, jes' she an' her maw, listenin' to Miss Flora play." He held the door open for them to enter, and motioned toward the music-room door, which stood ajar. A bright fire blazed on the white tiled hearth. On one side sat a gentle, sweet-faced lady in black; "Buddy's grandmother," thought Magnolia, as she noticed her gray hair. On the other side, on a low stool, with her hands clasped over her knees, sat Miss Katherine, looking into the embers. The firelight shone on her red dress, and cast a rosy glow to every part of the cheerful room. Both were listening so intently to the soft nocturne that Miss Flora was playing, that Lloyd's knock made them start with surprise.

"Well, well! It's the Little Colonel!" exclaimed the lady in black, holding out her hand to welcome her. "Come up to the fire, my dear. Both of you." She smiled reassuringly at Magnolia, who leaned against a chair by the door, staring around her with big blue eyes, like a frightened kitten.

Lloyd plunged into her story at once, for the time was too short to stand on ceremony. At the mention of costumes Miss Katherine was all attention, and turned to Magnolia with critical interest.

"Suppose you take her hair out of those tight little tails," she suggested, "and let me see how long it is."

Lloyd obeyed instantly, and the soft, light hair, released from its plaits, stood out in a short, frizzy crop, reaching only a little below her collar. It was very becoming. Lloyd was amazed at the change it made in the child's appearance.

"The very thing I want for my Knave of Hearts!" cried Miss Katherine, clasping her hands enthusiastically, and turning toward her mother. "I am illustrating that old jingle about the Queen of Hearts who made some tarts upon a summer day. I've a lovely picture for the queen, but I haven't been able to find a suitable boy for the knave 'who spied those tarts and stole them all away.' But there she stands. Her hair is exactly the right length, and she's so fat and cute that if I can just get her to roll those round blue eyes the way I want them, it will make a perfect love of a picture."

"But the costume," suggested Mrs. Marks. "It is so elaborate, and the time is short."

Miss Katherine looked at the clock. "One can do wonders in an hour," she said, and burying her face in her hands a moment, she thought intently.

"Genius burns," she announced in a moment, looking up at her sister. "Where's that little white duck suit that Lucien outgrew and left here one summer? I saved it for just such an emergency. I'm sure it will fit her."

"Packed away in the tower-room," answered Miss Flora. "I know just where to put my hand on it, though. Is there anything else you want while I am up there?"

"Yes, some scraps of red velvet if there are any left in the piece-bag. I have everything else we'll need, in the studio. That red canton flannel I sometimes use for draping backgrounds, will make a long flowing cape to hang from the back of his neck and sweep the ground behind him."

Magnolia felt as if she were a big doll as she was handed around from one to another in the trying on process, when Miss Flora came back with the suit. It did fit her passably well, and she and Lloyd were set to work at once, cutting out dozens of red velvet hearts.

"Makes me think of the time that I was the Queen of Hearts at Gingah's valentine pah'ty, and the old bear that the boys tied to the bedpost frightened us neahly to death," said Lloyd.

Snip, snip went both pair of scissors, and as fast

as the hearts were cut, Miss Katherine and Miss Flora sewed them on to the little white duck blouse and knickerbockers. Even Mrs. Marks helped, fastening frills of black ribbon and great gilt buckles on some old red house-slippers of Buddy's. It grew dark while they worked. Frazer lighted the lamps and piled more wood on the fire, and Lloyd began to think uneasily that the supper-bell would be ringing at the seminary soon.

But in shorter time than seemed possible, everything was done. When Magnolia was led to the long hall mirror to look at herself, she was unable to believe that what she saw was her own reflection. It looked like some bright-coloured illustration taken from a lovely picture-book.

Red hearts dotted the white duck suit, and white hearts the long red cape which trailed gracefully from her shoulders. A funny little crown copied in red and white pasteboard from the one they found on the Jack of Hearts in a deck of cards, rested on the short, light hair, curling up around her ears. There were lace ruffles at her wrists, and a tin sword at her side, and in her outstretched hands a little pie-tin, borrowed from the cook.

"Turn your head to one side, as if you were looking over your shoulder," commanded Miss

Katherine, "and hold the tart up high in front. Now lift your feet and sway back as if you were cake-walking. There, mamma, isn't that a perfect reproduction of the picture in our old Mother Goose? I'm charmed!"

The dropping of the tight-waisted, old-fashioned blue dress for this story-book attire changed the child's appearance so completely that she looked into the mirror half-frightened, feeling that her old self had run away from her. But there were Mrs. Marks and Miss Flora exclaiming "How pretty!" and the Princess clapping her hands and fluttering around her, calling out that she was perfectly lovely, and made the darlingest little Knave of Hearts that ever was seen, and Miss Katherine saying that if she would come over the next day at noon she would take her photograph.

No one had even called her pretty before, and she had never had her picture taken. Her eyes sparkled and her face lighted up as she turned again to the mirror.

"You and Betty come over to-morrow, too," said Miss Katherine to Lloyd, as she buttoned up the blue dress again, so that Magnolia could go back to supper. "I'd like to add Boy Blue and Bo-Peep to my Mother Goose gallery."

It was dark when Lloyd and Magnolia squeezed through the fence again and ran up the stairs to the room. As Lloyd passed the portière at the end of the hall she pushed it aside and drew back the bolt, as she had promised Kitty to do. They had barely time to lay their bundles on Magnolia's bed when the supper-bell rang, and they ran down to the dining-room. Lloyd was all aglow with excitement and pleasure over the success of the last hour's work, but Magnolia had shrunk back into the same timid little creature she was before her transformation. She had put her hair back into the tight little tails again before leaving Clovercroft, so that her disguise would be the more complete when she unloosed it and appeared as the little knave.

Meantime, Allison and Kitty, hurrying home with their guest, had delighted Norah by a demand for early supper. She and Barbry were expecting some friends from Rollington, a little Irish village near the Valley, and would be glad to be through with their work an hour earlier than usual.

"And you needn't light up for us down-stairs, except in the dining-room," said Allison, "for we're going straight to our rooms after supper, and we don't want to be disturbed till to-morrow morning."

"Very well, miss," answered Barbry, who,

a middle-aged woman, was the most trustworthy of well-trained maids. Mrs. Walton never felt any hesitancy in leaving the children in her care.

"And — oh, Barbry," said Allison, as she turned to leave the room. "To-night is Hallowe'en, and they say the witches are out and ghosts rise out of their graves. What is that tale they tell about a ghost that used to be seen about the seminary grounds?"

"Sure, an' your mother would be afther gettin' angry if I filled your heads with such nonsense. Who said there was ever a ghost at all in the Valley?"

But after much teasing Barbry allowed herself to be persuaded into telling a tale that had been afloat for years, of the little woman in gray who had once owned the land on which the seminary was built. She lived all alone, and was an odd character. Her peculiar mode of living, and the mystery surrounding her death, gave rise to the rumour that her spirit still haunted the seminary grounds. It was said that the little woman never appeared in public without a gray veil, and her wraith was recognized by the long gauzy covering floating loosely back from its face, not gray but white, as more becoming a spirit.

No sooner had Barbry finished her tale than Allison beckoned the girls to follow, and led the way up-stairs to the sewing-room. "I thought at first I'd just put a pillow-case over my head and wrap up in a sheet, but I'm going to make the girls think I'm the real article. How will this do?"

Taking a roll of cotton from one of the shelves, she pinned it over her hair to make a short white wig, powdered her face till it was as white as the cotton, and over it all threw a long piece of tulle, which she brought from a bureau drawer in her room. "Aunt Elise gave it to me last time I was in town," she said. "She had yards and yards of it that had been used some way in decorating with lilies for a luncheon. Wait till I wrap a sheet around me. Now how do I look?"

"Perfectly awful!" exclaimed Kitty, gazing at her in fascinated wonder that flesh and blood could look so truly ghost-like. Katie hid her eyes with a little scream.

"Don't look at me that way," she begged. "If you are this terrifying in daylight to people who know who you are, what will you be at night?"

Well satisfied with the effect she had produced, Allison folded up the veil, carefully removed the wig, and washed the powder from her face, while

Kitty and Katie rummaged in the drawers for some old, long-sleeved gingham aprons that had been discarded long ago. They had decided to go as rag dolls, as that would be the most complete disguise they could think of. Even their hair would be covered, and they would not need to speak.

"It will be terribly hot with all that cotton stuffed about our heads and necks," said Katie. "But we'll look *so* funny. And we must hold ourselves limp and lean up against things or flop over, just as real rag dolls do."

"Here are the aprons," cried Kitty, at last. "See? They'll fit up close around the neck and hide the place where the muslin that covers our head is tied on."

"I'll paint the faces on you the last thing before we start," said Allison.

"Mercy me! Allison!" exclaimed Katie. "We can't walk down past the depot and the store rigged up that way, even if it is dark. Somebody might think we were escaped freaks, and chase us. We ought to wait till we get to the seminary before we dress."

"No, there won't be time then, and everybody will know it's only a Hallowe'en frolic. If Kitty wears her golf-cape and you wear mine, and pull

the hoods away over your faces, nobody will notice. I'll not dress till afterward, for I'm not going to appear till the middle of the evening. I'm not going to go up to the gymnasium at all, but just glide around on the outskirts and lay a cold finger on some one now and then. I'll get a lump of ice out of the cooler if I can manage to slip into the dining-room. Now if you'll bring me the scissors I'll cut the muslin and fit it over your heads."

Mrs. Walton, sorry that her absence would deprive the girls of their anticipated Hallowe'en party, compensated for their disappointment as far as possible by ordering an unusually delicious little supper for them and their guest.

"Isn't it too tantalizing!" exclaimed Kitty, when Barbry had left the room for some hot biscuits. "Here's everything I like best, and I'm in such a hurry and so excited that I can hardly choke down a mouthful."

"Don't talk, then," commanded Allison. "Just *eat!*"

The meal proceeded in silence for a few moments, but the silence itself grew funny as they thought of the ludicrous figures they would soon present, and they began to giggle.

The giggles grew into shrieks of laughter a little

later, when they had gone up-stairs, and the two rag dolls, all stuffed, painted, and dressed, leaned limply against the wall and leered at each other. Even their hands looked comical, covered in white woollen gloves, each finger held stiffly out from the other. After one glance Allison rolled on the bed, holding her sides, laughing and gasping in turn.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, finally, sitting up and wiping her eyes and then going off into a fresh paroxysm of laughter as she looked at them again. "I never saw anything so funny in my life. The girls will simply shriek when they see you."

Norah and Barbry, sitting over their own supper, heard the laughing far down in the kitchen. They looked at each other and smiled, and then, as the contagious sound continued, laughed themselves. The merriment was irresistible. But a little later, busy with their preparations for their coming friends, they did not notice that the house grew strangely still, and that not another sound came from the rooms above all that evening.

Kitty's room adjoined Allison's. Bolting the door which opened into her mother's, on the inside, she passed through Allison's with Katie, and out into the hall. Then Allison locked her door on the

outside and hid the key under the hall rug. Creeping down the stairs, they stole out at the side door, locked it after them, and hid the key inside a large flower-pot on the porch.

"That's safer than carrying it," said Allison. "We'd be sure to lose it, and then we would be in a pretty pickle."

The moon, overcast by shifting clouds, was just beginning to throw a faint, ghostly glimmer over the Valley as the girls hurried out.

"Let's go back way until we are past grandmother's gate," said Kitty. Edgewood, Mrs. MacIntyre's place, was just across from The Beeches, and some one was strolling up the avenue toward it. "Uncle Harry," whispered Allison, crouching down in the shadow of a tree until he had gone in.

Rustling along in the dry leaves, they passed the rear of the cottage next door, the manse, and the little stone church. That brought them out into the wide, open space below the ridge, where the lights gleamed from every window in the Soldiers' Home. The girls drew their hoods closer over their faces as they hurried across the churchyard, out through the iron gate into the road.

"It makes me think of the night we had a Hallowe'en party at the haunted house of Hartwell Hollow,"

said Katie, looking up at the bare branches overhead, which were beginning to toss in the rising wind. Then she clapped a white-gloved hand over her rag mouth to choke back a giggle. Kitty had begun holding her arms in the aimless fashion peculiar to rag dolls, and was walking along as if she had no bones.

"For goodness' sake, behave yourself," begged Allison. "Don't get us to laughing out here on the road!"

Kitty straightened up as they passed the deserted post-office, and they quickened their pace until they were safely beyond the store and the depot. A moment later they had passed through the woodland gate of Clovercroft, raced along the path below the ice-house, and were squeezing through the gap in the picket fence to the seminary grounds.

"They must be almost through supper," whispered Katie, peeping in at one of the dining-room windows, over which the blind had not been entirely drawn. "With all that laughing and talking they'll never hear us go up the stairs. We can make as much noise as we please."

A dim light burned in the upper hall, but no lamp was lighted in Betty and Lloyd's room.

"Let's not make any," suggested Allison.

"They'll think we haven't come. Let's hide and see what they do when they suddenly discover us."

As she spoke there was a sound of many feet in the lower hall, then on the stairs, and an unusual buzz of voices. The girls were scattering to their rooms to dress for the masquerade.

"Hurry!" gasped Allison, stooping down behind a tall rocking-chair. Kitty rolled under one bed and Katie under the other, and there they lay waiting, trying to stifle the giggles which nearly choked them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HALLOWE'EN MASQUERADE

"I'LL make a light," said Betty, groping across the room with a handful of matches which she had taken from the box in the hall. Lloyd started to follow, but, stumbling over a footstool, felt her way to the bed and sat down on the edge of it to wait for a light. On the way up from supper she had started to repeat a funny story which she had heard at Clovercroft that afternoon, and she kept on with it as Betty, having found her way to the table, struck a match. But she stopped again, as the match went out with a sudden puff, as if a strong draught had blown it.

"There! It never fails to do that when I'm in a hurry," exclaimed Betty, striking another match as she spoke. It was extinguished as suddenly as the first. She tried another and another with the same result.

"How strange!" she said, wonderingly. "There isn't a window open anywhere, is there?"

"It's the witches," declared Lloyd, laughing. "There must be one standing there by yoah elbow."

The laugh ended in a piercing shriek as she felt something clutch her ankle. "Murdah! Murdah!" she yelled. "Ow! There's something awful undah the bed! It grabbed me by the foot! Ow! Ow!"

"Hush up, goosey!" commanded a familiar voice, and as Betty struck her fifth and last match, which burned steadily, they saw Allison dashing to the door to lock it. Doors were opening all along the corridors, and footsteps hurrying from every direction in response to Lloyd's terrified cry.

"Tell them that it's all right! That it's only a Hallowe'en scare," demanded Allison, in a stage whisper. "Don't let them in. I blew out the matches, and it's only Kitty and Katie under the beds."

"It's all right," called Lloyd, in a quavering tone, but the matron's knock was imperative, and Betty, beckoning the girls frantically toward the closet, fumbled with the bolt until they had whisked into hiding. The one brief glimpse of the rag dolls, falling over each other in their mad haste to escape, was so comical that both Lloyd and Betty were choking with laughter when the matron entered. They could hardly control their voices while they

tried to tell her how the matches had gone out and Lloyd had imagined that there were witches in the room.

Smiling indulgently at their foolishness, which she attributed to the excitement of the occasion, the matron withdrew. She could hear them still laughing when she passed through the hall again, several minutes later, for the rag dolls, coming out of the closet as soon as she disappeared, began taking one ridiculous pose after another, in the middle of the floor. The solemn silence in which they struck their limp, boneless attitudes, made the scene all the funnier, and as the girls looked at the surprised expressions Allison had painted on the flat muslin faces, they went into such hysterical laughter that the tears streamed down their faces.

"Oh, girls, *do* stop!" begged Lloyd, finally, wiping her eyes. "I've laughed till I ache, and it's time for me to dress, for I promised Magnolia to help her into her costume."

Katie and Kitty subsided into a heap on the divan. "Could you have told who we were if you hadn't known we were coming?" asked Katie.

"Never in the world," answered Betty. "I couldn't tell which is which now, if it were not for your voices."

"We're not going to say a word to any one," said Katie. "We oughtn't to talk, you know, if we carry out our part as it should be. We'll slip up into the gymnasium pretty soon, and be sitting on the floor in a corner when the others come up. We'll lop around and watch the fun till the unmasking begins, then we'll come down here and wait for the rest of you."

All the time they had been performing, Allison had been busy before the mirror, and now turned around in her spectral attire.

"The ghost of the veiled lady!" cried Lloyd. "Oh, Allison, yoah make-up is splendid. You're enough to freeze the blood in one's veins. There couldn't be anything moah spooky-looking than that thin tulle veil. I wish Mom Beck could see you. I've heard her talking about that queah little woman whose house used to stand where the seminary cellah is dug now, till I couldn't close my eyes at night. All the darkies believe she still haunts the place."

Betty had never heard the story, so Allison repeated it while she dressed, adding, "You two must do all you can to spread the report that I'm lurking around. You have seen me yourself, you know. If I had my lump of ice, you'd soon feel the touch of my clammy fingers. I wish you'd give me a

piece of newspaper to wrap it in, Betty. Then it won't drip."

"I wish we could carry a lump of ice around with us," gasped Kitty. "All this cotton packed around my head and neck makes me so hot I can scarcely breathe."

Miss Edith and Mrs. Clelling, putting the finishing touches to the decorations in the gymnasium, looked around, well pleased. A score of jack-o'-lanterns grinned sociably from the brackets between the windows. Two more kept guard on each side of the piano, and at least a dozen lighted the long table stretched across one end of the room, on which the spread was arranged. Graceful sprays of bittersweet-vine trailed their bright berries over the white cloth. A huge pumpkin-bowl piled with grapes formed the centrepiece. A pitcher of sweet cider stood at each end, and nuts, persimmons, pop-corn balls, gingerbread, and apples filled all the space between.

"It is well worth the trouble," said Miss Edith, lighting the last candle. "The girls will enjoy it thoroughly."

Some one called both teachers from the room just then, and in their absence two uninvited guests,

who had been waiting behind the door, hurried in and seated themselves on the floor in the dimmest corner.

"I should say it *is* worth the trouble," whispered one rag doll to the other, as they looked around the room at the fantastic decorations. "It's lots more fun coming here this way, than having the party at home, and it's more fun than if we'd been invited."

"I'm nearly roasted," panted the other one, "but I'm glad I'm here. Oh, how pretty!"

It was the entrance of one of the older girls in court train and powdered hair that caused the exclamation, and while they were trying to guess who it could be, the others began to arrive. Old King Cole and Pocahontas came in arm in arm, followed by Red Riding Hood and a brownie, while Puss in Boots proudly escorted Aladdin with his lamp.

Little Bo-Peep and Boy Blue were soon recognized, for Betty had made no attempt to hide the brown curls which helped to make her such a pretty little Dresden shepherdess; and while Lloyd had gathered up her long, light hair under the wide-brimmed hat with its blue ribbon, every graceful gesture and every step she took, holding herself

erect with a proud lifting of the head, proclaimed the Little Colonel.

For once in her short life, little Magnolia Budine tasted the sweets of social success, for no one there was more popular or more admired than the saucy Knave of Hearts. With the putting on of the costume she had put on a courage and self-possession that never could have been assumed with the old-fashioned tight-waisted blue merino and the stiff short tails of hair. Grasping the stolen tart firmly in her chubby hands, and lifting the little slippers with their huge bows and buckles in the high, mincing step Miss Katherine had taught her, she swaggered coquettishly up and down the room, her red mantle sweeping behind her. Wherever she went a flock of admiring girls crowded around her.

For many a month afterward her red and white crown hung over her mirror, not only as a souvenir of the jolly revel, but as a token that for one night, at least, she had found favour in the eyes of the Princess. Not only had Lloyd circled around her when she was dressed, exclaiming again that she looked perfectly lovely, but when they chose partners for the ghost-walk, to march solemnly through the halls to the slow music of the Dead March, the Princess had chosen her. Lloyd had looked around

for Ida, who had come as a Puritan Maid; but the cap and kerchief were nowhere to be seen. She had evidently grown tired of the affair and gone to her room.

Magnolia did not know that she was second choice. Her cup of happiness was overflowing when Boy Blue turned away from Aladdin and Red Riding Hood, who were both trying to claim her, and said, "No, this little Knave must be my partner. He has stolen my heart as well as the queen's tarts."

In their corner near the piano Kitty and Katie sat stiffly against the wall, seemingly incapable of moving themselves. Several times some of the larger girls made an attempt to lift them, and in whatever position they fell when they were dropped, they lay with hands thrust out and heads lolling to one side. There was a laughing crowd around them continually.

"Oh, my country!" gasped Katie, as the first solemn chords of the Dead March struck her ear and all light in the room was suddenly extinguished except what gleamed from the eyes and mouths of the jack-o'-lanterns. "They've gone and dragged in old Sally, the skeleton. It's bad enough to hear her bones rattle in the physiology class in the daytime; but this is more than I bargained for."

"'THIS LITTLE KNAVE MUST BE MY PARTNER.'"

"Now is the time for us to go," whispered Kitty. "They'll unmask soon. We've seen how they all look and set them to guessing, and we'd better miss the refreshments than run the risk of being discovered."

Katie eyed the table wishfully. "It seems a pity to miss all that spread. Couldn't we creep around the wall to the far side and slip something into our apron pockets? The cloth is so long it would hide us."

"What's to hinder our getting under the table and staying through the whole performance?" suggested Kitty. "The cloth comes nearly to the floor, and I don't believe anybody would think of looking under it. Then we could hear them wonder who we are and where we've disappeared to when they unmask and we are missing."

"Quick, then, while their backs are turned!" exclaimed Katie, not waiting to consider consequences or means of escape later in the evening. Slowly, solemnly, with measured tread, the long procession filed by, and, wheeling to the music, started back toward the other end of the long gymnasium.

Creeping on hands and knees, fearful lest some backward glance might discover them should they stand erect, the two girls, like wary mice, scuttled

across the room and disappeared under the sheltering table-cloth.

Grown bold with their successful venture, Kitty proposed that each time the procession turned away from them, they should reach out and grab something from the table. It was an exciting performance. Time after time, as the motley figures turned their backs, two ludicrous heads popped up above the table, and four white woollen gloves clawed hastily at different dishes. When the marauders dropped from sight the last time, there was a goodly store of provisions gathered up in each gingham apron.

"I wouldn't have missed this for anything," giggled Katie some time later, when the unmasking began, and the girls crowded around the table for nuts and apples with which to try their fortunes. In such a babel of voices there was no danger of being overheard.

"Listen! we can tell from the different remarks who every one represented," they whispered to each other.

"Oh, Evelyn Ward, I knew all the time that you were the court lady. I recognized your rings."

"That's what fooled me about Aladdin. Susie Figgs had changed rings with Ada."

"Well, I guessed nearly everybody the first half-hour, except those ridiculous rag dolls. Does anybody know where they have gone?"

That started the discussion the two under the table had been waiting for, and the various guesses, falling wide of the mark, were so amusing that their mirth nearly betrayed their hiding-place. Once they thought their discovery was certain. They had been feeding themselves from the store of provisions in their aprons as well as the size of their muslin mouths would allow. The mouths had been only small slits at first, but they had stretched and torn them with their fingers until they were large enough to allow them to take a good-sized bite of apple. As they sat there, munching nuts and pop-corn, Kitty whispered, "We're like the man in the verse:

> "'There was a young man so benighted,
> He never knew when he was slighted.
> He went to a party,
> And ate just as hearty
> As if he'd been really invited.'"

Katie tried hard not to laugh, but the effort ended in a snort, and she almost choked on a grain of pop-corn. If some one had not upset a jack-o'-lantern just then and started a wild scramble to put out the candle before it burned the cloth, the

unbidden guests must certainly have been discovered.

Gradually the crowd around the table dwindled away, as little groups gathered in different parts of the room, intent on various ways of fortune-telling. Having eaten all they could, and not being able to hear anything more of interest, the girls under the table began to grow tired of their position. Moreover, the heat of their costumes seemed to grow more unbearable every minute.

"We're in a trap," groaned Katie. "How we are ever going to make our escape is —"

Kitty never heard the rest of the sentence, for half a dozen girls, who had ventured down the cellar steps with candle and looking-glass, came bursting into the room almost hysterical with fright. Breathless from their headlong race up three flights of stairs, they gasped out their news in broken sentences, each voice in a different key.

"Oh, a real ghost! None of your sheet and pillow-case affairs!"

"White hair and a face like marble and a long floating veil!"

"And it clutched Mary Phillips with fingers that were like the dead! Didn't it, Mary?"

"No, it didn't come out of the cellar. It just *appeared!*"

"The most awful wail as it vanished!"

"The cook saw it earlier in the evening, floating away toward the graveyard, not walking, you know, but *floating!* About a foot above the ground!"

"Allison has evidently had as much fun as anybody," whispered Kitty. "Oh, will you listen! There goes Lloyd vowing it's the spirit of the veiled lady, and that she saw it twice this evening."

"And Betty, too! That will convince them if anything could. Betty is always so serious in the way she tells things."

"Now is the time to go, while they're all so excited and in the other end of the room," whispered Kitty. "Let's make a wild dash for the door nearest us, bang it behind us, and blow out the hall light. Then we can slide down the banister, put out the light in the lower hall, and be safe in the west wing before they come to their senses. Now, ready!"

It was a daring move, but it proved successful. Every one heard a scramble, and turned in time to see two crouching figures dash into the hall. They were too startled to know whether they were human or not. Somebody screamed when the door banged

violently, and Mary Phillips, who had been in a tremble ever since her flight from the cellar, was nearly paralyzed with fright. She clutched her nearest neighbour, wailing, "Oh, what is it?"

By the time matches were brought and the lamps were relit, Katie and Kitty were safely locked in Lloyd's room, tearing off their disguises and wiping the perspiration from their flushed faces. For a few minutes they waited, half-expecting that a search would be made, but as time went on and no one ventured into that part of the house, they began to try the Hallowe'en charms that they could not take part in up-stairs. When Allison came in half an hour later, she found them whirling apple parings around their heads and flinging them over their shoulders, to see what initials they would form in falling.

By the time Allison had washed the powder from her face and picked the cotton from her hair, Lloyd and Betty came in. It seemed as if they could never settle down enough to think of sleep. There was so much to talk over. Allison curled up on the divan, announcing that it was not worth while to undress, as it would soon be time for them to start home. Kitty and Katie followed her example, appropriating Lloyd's single bed. Lloyd and Betty

took the other one, and they lay whispering until midnight.

Just as the clock struck twelve Lloyd got up and lighted a candle. Five eggs, which she had boiled in the chafing-dish earlier in the evening, lay on a plate on the table. The yolks had been removed and the space filled with salt. According to a previous agreement, each girl got up and took one of the eggs. Standing in the middle of the floor in solemn silence they ate them stoically, although the salt burned and choked them. Then without a drop of water afterward, they walked backward to bed. According to the charm, whatever they dreamed after that performance would come true, and unless they were to be old maids, some one would appear in their dreams bearing a cup of water. That one would be their "fate."

None of the five slept soundly that night. The salt made them thirsty, the crowded quarters restless. Allison wakened every time a rooster crowed or a dog barked, because she felt that the responsibility of getting home before Barbry wakened rested upon her. Once when she was about to sink into a delicious doze, the shrill whistle of a locomotive aroused her to the consciousness that the early freight-train was rumbling past the depot. Opening

her eyes she saw that the gray dawn was beginning to steal over the Valley. With a groan she sat up and stumbled across the room to arouse the others.

She had to shake Kitty several times, and when she at last staggered to her feet she yawningly quoted old Aunt Cindy's expression, that she was "as tired as a thousand of dawgs," and vowed she could never get home unless she was dragged there. Katie complained of a headache and a miserable "after the ball" feeling. It was a sorry-looking little trio which finally stumbled down the back stairs and out into the frosty dawn. Not a word was spoken on the way home. In silence they slipped up the stairs at The Beeches; in silence they undressed and crept into bed, and three hours later, when Barbry came as usual to call them, she knocked half a dozen times before she succeeded in arousing them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRINCESS OF THE PENDULUM

THERE were literary exercises in the chapel the following Friday afternoon. It was the day for the reading of the *Seminary Star,* a monthly paper to which all the grades contributed. As a humourous account of the Hallowe'en celebrated was to be one of the chief features, spiced by many personal allusions, its appearance was looked for eagerly.

Little Magnolia Budine was the only one in the room impatient for the exercises to close. She sat near a front window looking out at every sound of approaching wheels, to see if the old carryall had stopped at the high green gate in front of the seminary. She had been hoping all afternoon that her father would come for her earlier than usual, and she half-expected that he would. The chill November days were short, and she knew that he would want to reach home before dark.

It was not that she failed to appreciate the interesting articles in the *Star,* but she was in a hurry

for the ten-mile drive to be over. The reason for her impatience was packed away in the old carpet-bag, waiting outside in the hall. Unless she reached home before dark, a certain pleasure she had in store would have to be delayed till morning. So intent was she on listening for the sound of wheels, that she failed to hear the title of a short poem, which one of the editors announced as written by E. L. L. When Elise nudged her, whispering, "That's about you, Maggie," she turned with a start and blush to find every one looking at her. She was so confused she heard only the last verse:

"Not only did he steal the tarts
Made by the gracious queen,
He captured all the schoolgirls' hearts —
That little knave — on Hallowe'en."

The applause which followed was loud and long. Her heart gave a proud, glad throb at this public compliment, but her face felt as if it were on fire, and she longed to drop under her desk out of sight. It was just at this moment that Mrs. Clelling told her in a low tone that her father had come and she might be excused. How she ever got to the door with all those eyes fastened on her was more than she could tell. She felt as if each foot

weighed a ton, and that she was an hour travelling the short space.

Snatching her hat from the cloak-room and pinning a big gray shawl around her, she caught up the carpet-bag and ran down to the gate. An occasional snowflake, like a downy white feather, floated through the air. The wind was raw and damp, and she was glad to climb in behind the sheltering curtains of the old carryall and lean up against her father's rough, warm overcoat.

"Well, Puss, how goes it?" he asked, pulling an old bedquilt up over his knees and tucking it well around her.

"*Fine,* daddy!" she answered, squeezing his arm in both her mittened hands and snuggling up to him like a contented kitten. "I think now it's the nicest school in the world, and I like it better and better every day."

"Got a good report this week?"

"Yes, I haven't missed a single word in spelling. Mrs. Clelling had to show me nearly two hours about borrowing in subtraction, but I don't have any more trouble with it now, and I had a longer list of adjectives on my language-paper than anybody else in the class."

There was a look of pride in the old farmer's

weather-beaten face. He had had little education himself. He had barely learned to read and write in the few short terms he had been able to attend school when he was a boy. He couldn't have told an adjective from any other part of speech, and his wonder at her amount of learning was all the greater on that account. He patted her hand affectionately. "That's right! That's right!" he exclaimed. "The family's dependin' on you, Puss, to do us all credit." Then he began repeating what she had heard a hundred times before. He never failed to tell her the same story as they jogged homeward every Friday night and back again the following Monday morning. She had heard it so often that it sounded in her ears like the familiar refrain of an old song to which she need pay no heed. She only waited patiently until he had finished.

"The older children didn't have no chance when they was young like you. We were too far away from the public schools to send 'm except just a spell spring and fall, and we couldn't afford the pay schools, but after we moved up here and Marthy got married and Tom and Hilliard was big enough to do for 'emselves and getting good wages, times was easier. Ma says to me, 'We'll give the baby

a fair start in the world, anyhow,' and I says, 'She'll have the best diplomy that Lloydsboro Seminary can give if I have to carry her there and home again on my back every day till she gets it.'"

There was much more in the same strain to which Magnolia listened, waiting for her turn to speak, as one would wait for an alarm clock to run down when it was striking. The moment he paused she began, eagerly, "I've got something right now that mammy will be proud to see."

Diving under the quilt for the carpet-bag, she opened it and took out a book which lay on top of her clothes.

"Now put on your spectacles, daddy," she ordered, gaily, "or maybe you won't be able to tell who it is." She slipped a photograph from the book and held it up before him. Holding the reins between his knees, he pulled off one glove, felt in various pockets, and finally fished up a pair of steel-bowed spectacles, which he slowly adjusted.

"Miss Katherine Marks took it," she explained, "and she painted it afterward, so you can tell exactly how I looked at the masquerade-party."

"If it ain't my little magnolia blossom!" exclaimed the old man, proudly, holding the beautifully

tinted photograph off at arm's length for a better view. "Wherever did you get all those fine gewgaws? Why, Puss, you're prettier than a posy. Sort of fanciful and trimmed up, but that's your little face natural as life. I should say your mammy will be proud!"

It took all the time while they were driving the next six miles for Magnolia to tell of that memorable afternoon and night. How Lloyd Sherman had taken her over to Clovercroft, and all the Marks family had helped to make her costume. How beautiful it was, and how the girls had praised it, and even published a poem about her in the *Seminary Star;* and next day Miss Katherine had taken her picture, and the day after that had sent for her to come over to her studio, and had given her a copy of it to take home.

"Seems to me as if we ought to do something nice for those people who have been so kind to you," said her father, musingly, when she had told him the whole story. "You say if it hadn't been for Miss Katherine you'd have had to miss the party. If you'd have missed that you wouldn't have had that poetry about you in the paper. I'm proud of that, Puss. Seems as if my little girl is mighty popular — a sort of celebrity, to get into

the paper. I'd like to show that young lady that I appreciate what she's done to make you happy. I wonder how she'd like a crock of your mammy's apple butter. There ain't no better apple butter in all Oldham County, and I should think she'd be glad to get it. I'll speak about it when we get home, and if your mammy's willing, I'll carry a crock of it to the young lady when I take you back to school Monday morning."

Magnolia was not sure of the propriety of such a gift, and he turned the matter over in his slow mind all the rest of the way home. They jogged along in silence, for she also was busy with her thoughts. She was thinking of another picture in the library book which she had not showed her father. It was an unmounted photograph of Lloyd Sherman which Miss Katherine had taken the year before.

She had photographed all the children who took part in the play of the " Rescue of the Princess Winsome," and they were arranged on a panel on her studio wall. There were several of Lloyd; one at the spinning-wheel, one with her arms around Hero's neck, and one with the knight kneeling to take her hand from the old king's. But the most beautiful one of all was the one of the Dove Song. That

picture hung by itself. It was just a little medallion, showing the head of the Princess with the white dove nestled against her shoulder. The fair hair with its coronet of pearls made a halo around the sweet little face, and Magnolia stood gazing at it as if it had been the picture of an angel. She had no eyes for anything else in the studio, and Miss Flora, seeing her gaze of rapt admiration, looked across at her sister and smiled significantly.

"Haven't you a copy of that you could give her, Katherine?" she asked, in a low tone. "I never saw a child's face express such wistful longing. It makes me think of some of the little waifs I have seen at Christmas time, gazing hungrily into the shop windows at the toys and bon-bons they know can never be for them."

Miss Katherine opened a table drawer, and, after searching a few minutes among the unmounted photographs it contained, took out one, regarding it critically.

"This was a trifle too light to suit me," she said, "but too good to destroy." She crossed the room and held it out to Magnolia, who still stood gazing at its duplicate on the wall.

Such a look of rapture came into the child's face when it was finally made clear to her that she was

to have the picture to keep that no one noticed the omission of spoken thanks. She was too embarrassed to say anything, but she took it as if it were something sacred.

"I suppose because Lloyd happens to be the goddess just now to whom she burns incense," said Miss Katherine when she had gone. "These little schoolgirl affairs are very amusing sometimes. They're so intense while they last."

Maggie could not have told why she did not show the picture of the Princess to her father. In an undefined sort of way she felt that he would look at it as he would look at the picture of any little girl, and that he would not understand that she was so much finer and better and more beautiful and different in every way from all the other girls in the world. But Corono would understand. For two days Magnolia had looked forward to the pleasure of showing it to her.

"Can't you get old Dixie out of a walk, daddy?" she exclaimed at last. "I'm mighty anxious to get home before sundown. I want to stop at Roney's with this library book, and show her the picture, too."

Aroused from his reverie the old farmer clucked

to his horse, and they went bumping down the stony pike at a gait which satisfied even Maggie's impatient desire for speed.

"I reckon Roney will be mighty glad to see you," he remarked, as he stopped the horse in front of an old cabin a short distance from his own home. "She's been worse this week. You'll have half an hour yet before sundown," he added, as he turned the wheel for her to climb out of the carryall.

"I'll stay till supper-time," she called back over her shoulder, "for I have so much to tell her this week."

With the library book tucked away under the old gray shawl, she ran down the straggling path to the little whitewashed cabin.

Roney would understand. Roney had always understood things from the time they had first been neighbours on a lonely farm near Loretta. That was when Magnolia was a baby, and Corono, six years older, without a playmate and without a toy, had daily borrowed her and played with her as if she had been a great doll. It was Corono who had discovered her first tooth, and who had coaxed her to take her first step, and had taught her nearly everything she knew, from threading a needle and tying a knot, to spelling out the words on the tomb-

stones in the nuns' graveyard. Corono could often tell what she was thinking about, even before she said a word. She was the only one at home to whom Magnolia ever mentioned the Princess.

Several years before the two families had moved away together from the old place. In that time Corono's mother had died, and her father had become so crippled with rheumatism that he could no longer manage to do the heavy work on the farm he had rented. They were glad to accept their old neighbour's offer of an empty cabin on his place. After that, when Corono was not at the farmhouse helping Mrs. Budine with her cleaning or sewing or pickle-making, Magnolia was at the cabin, following at the little housekeeper's very heels, as she went about her daily tasks. But now for several months Corono had been barely able to drag from one room to another. Whether it was a fall she had had in the early summer which injured her back, or whether it was some disease of the spine past his skill to discover, the doctor from the cross-roads could not decide.

Her father had to be housekeeper now, and they would have had meagre fare oftentimes, had not a generous share of every pie and pudding baked in the Budine kitchen found its way to their table.

The weeks would have been almost unbearably monotonous to Corono after Magnolia started to school had she not looked forward to the Fridays, when her return meant the bringing of a new library book, and another delightfully interesting chapter of her life at the seminary.

These glimpses into a world so different from her own gave her something to think about all week, as she dragged wearily about, trying to help her father in his awkward struggles with the cooking and cleaning. She thought about them at night, too, when the pain in her back kept her awake. Betty and Lloyd and Allison, Kitty and Elise and Katie Mallard, were as real to her as they were to Maggie. They would have stared in astonishment could they have known that every week a sixteen-year-old girl, whom they had never seen, and of whom they had barely heard, was waiting to ask a dozen eager questions about them.

Maggie ran in without knocking, bringing such a breath of fresh air and fresh interest with her that Corono's face brightened instantly. She was lying on the bed with a shawl thrown over her.

"I've been listening for you for more than an hour," said Corono, propping herself up on her elbow. "I thought the time never would pass.

I counted the ticking of the clock, and then I tried to see how much of Betty's play I could repeat. I've read it so many times this week that I know it nearly all by heart."

She picked up the book which lay beside her on the bed. It was the library copy of "The Rescue of the Princess Winsome," which Maggie had brought to her the previous Friday. It had been in such constant demand since the opening of school that she had been unable to obtain it earlier.

Maggie, about to plunge into an account of her Hallowe'en experiences, checked herself as Corono winced with pain and her face grew suddenly white. "What's the matter?" she asked, sympathetically. "Do you feel very bad?"

To her astonishment Corono buried her face in her pillow to hide the tears that were trickling down her cheeks, and began to sob.

"I'll run get mammy," said the frightened child, who had never seen Corono give way to her feelings in such fashion before.

"No, don't!" she sobbed. "I'll be all right — in a minute. I'm just nervous — from the pain — I haven't slept much — lately!"

Maggie sat motionless, afraid to make any at-

tempt at consolation, even so much as patting her cheek with her plump little hand. Roney was the one who had always comforted *her*. She did not know what to do, now that their positions were suddenly reversed. She was relieved when Roney presently wiped her eyes and said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "There! You never saw me make a baby of myself before! Did you! But I couldn't help it. Sometimes when it gets this way I wish I could die. But I've just *got* to keep on living for daddy's sake. I don't suppose any one ever told you, and you couldn't understand unless you knew.

"It's this way. My mother's family never wanted her to marry daddy, and they disowned her when she did, because he wasn't educated and rich and all that, as they were. They never spoke to her afterward, but when my grandfather came to die, I reckon he was sorry for the way he'd done, for he wanted to send for her. It was too late, though. She had died that spring. Then he tried to make it up in a way, by being good to me, and he left me an annuity. I can't explain to you just what that is, but every year as long as I live his lawyer is to pay me some money. It isn't much, but it is all that daddy and I have had to live on since

he hasn't been able to work. When I die the money will stop coming, so I feel that I *must* keep on living even when every breath is agony, as it is sometimes. I don't think I can stand it much longer. There are days when I just have to grit my teeth and say I *won't* give up! I will hang on for poor daddy's sake. Sometimes I believe that is all that keeps me alive."

She stopped abruptly, seeing the tears of distress in Maggie's eyes, and made an attempt to laugh.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Now that I've poured out all my troubles and eased my mind, I feel better. Tell me about the girls. What have they been doing this week?"

Much relieved, Maggie produced the photograph of herself, and began an enthusiastic account of her Hallowe'en experiences. She began with the visit to Clovercroft, and as she described the handsomely furnished music-room, with its luxurious rugs and grand piano, and the priceless pictures that had been brought from over the sea, its lace curtains and white tiled hearth and andirons that shone like gold, it seemed to her that the little cabin had never looked so bare. Its chinked walls and puncheon floor stood out in pitiful contrast. The

only picture in the room was an unframed chromo tacked above the mantel.

As she described the masquerade frolic, she contrasted Roney's lonely shut-in life with her own and the other girls' at the seminary. A realization of its meagreness and emptiness stole over her till she could hardly keep the tears back. A great longing sprang up in her warm little heart to do something that would compensate as far as possible for all that she had missed. Acting on that impulse, as she reached the climax of her story and drew out the cherished photograph of the Princess, she thrust it into Roney's hand, saying, hurriedly, "Here, you can have it, Roney. I'd rather you would have it than me."

Corono held the picture eagerly, studying every detail of the beautiful little medallion. The fair hair with its coronet of pearls, the white dove nestled against her shoulder, as she had held it when she sang "Flutter and fly, flutter and fly, bear him my heart of gold," — all seemed doubly attractive now with the play fresh in her mind. Besides, it was the most beautiful picture she had ever seen in all the sixteen years of her lonely, unsatisfied life.

The intuition that always helped her to under-

stand her little friend made her understand now in a way that the gift meant a sacrifice, and she exclaimed, impulsively, "Oh, Maggie! I don't feel as if I ought to take it from you. You keep it, and just lend it to me once in awhile."

"No, I want you to have it," said Maggie, drawing the old shawl up around her. "Goodness me! It's getting dark. I'll have to run," and before Corono could make another protest she rushed away.

As she ran along the path that crossed the pasture between the cabin and the farmhouse, there was a tremulous smile on her face, but the faint twilight also showed tears in her eyes. The smile was for the joy she knew she had given Roney, but the tears were for herself. Nobody knew how much of a sacrifice she had made in giving up the picture of the Princess. Even Roney had not guessed how great it was. But she had no regret next morning when she came back to the cabin. Roney greeted her eagerly.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to the old wooden clock which stood on the mantel. "I didn't have a frame to put the picture in, and I was afraid it would get spoiled without glass over it. While I was looking around the room wondering what

to do, I happened to notice that it was the same size as the pendulum. Daddy lifted it down for me, and I fastened the picture on that. So there it is all safe and sound behind the glass door, and I can see it from any part of the room.

"And, oh, Maggie, you don't know how it helped me last night. It made the play seem so real to me. As I lay here watching the pendulum, it stopped saying 'Tick tock, tick tock.' It seemed to me that the Princess was looking straight at me, saying, instead, '*For love — will find — a way!*' Then I knew that she meant me. That love would help me bear the pain for daddy's sake; that my living along as bravely as I could was like spinning the golden thread, and that I mustn't think about the great skein that the weeks and months were piling up ahead for me to do; I must just spin a minute at a time. I can stand the pain when I count it with the pendulum. Even when the fire died down and I couldn't see her any longer, I could hear her saying it over and over, 'For love — will find — a way.' And I lay there in the dark and pretended that I was a princess, too, spinning love's golden thread, and that my dove was a little white prayer that I could send fluttering up to God, asking him to help me

find the way to be brave and patient, and to hang on to life as long as I possibly can for daddy's sake."

Little did the Shadow Club dream that day how far their shadow-selves were reaching. But Betty's song brought comfort and courage for many an hour into Roney's lonely life, and the greatest solace in her keenest suffering was the smiling face of the Princess, swaying back and forth upon the pendulum.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE RAINY AFTERNOON

THAT same Saturday afternoon following the Hallowe'en frolic, while Maggie rehearsed the whole affair once more in the cabin, the Shadow Club discussed it at the seminary. They had met early, for Lloyd and Betty had asked permission to make candy in their room, and in order to finish the amount of work they had planned to do at each meeting, it was necessary for them to begin immediately after dinner.

It was a dull November day, cloudy and damp, and while they were settling themselves to work, the rain began to patter against the window-panes.

"How cosy and shut-in it makes you feel!" exclaimed Katie, looking around on the bright, comfortable room.

"We are shut in," answered Lloyd. "The Clark girls and Magnolia have gone home to stay ovah Sunday, and we have this whole wing to ourselves. Nobody can heah us, no mattah how loud we talk."

"Let's put up the sign, 'No admittance. Busy,' on the corridor door leading into our hall," suggested Ida. "On a rainy afternoon like this, when the girls can't get out-doors, they're more apt to go visiting, and we don't want to be interrupted."

"That's so," agreed Lloyd. Hastily scribbling the notice on an envelope, she ran out and fastened it on the door with a pin.

"Now we're safe," she announced on her return, and settled herself comfortably among the cushions of the window-seat. For half an hour their needles and brushes were plied rapidly, as they chattered and laughed over the various remarks they had heard about the mysterious Hallowe'en guests. Who they were still remained an unsolved riddle in the school.

Presently Ida dropped her embroidery-hoops and leaned back in her chair yawning. "Oh, I'm in no mood for work of this kind! My silks snarl, my needle keeps coming unthreaded, and I stick myself nearly every time I take a stitch. I'm making such a mess of it I'd stop only I don't want to shirk my part when you are all working so faithfully. When my embroidery acts this way it makes me so nervous I could scream."

"Why don't you do some more burnt-work instead?" suggested Katie.

"I'm out of leather. The last lot I sent for hasn't come."

"You might read to us while we work," suggested Betty. "There's a new *St. Nicholas* on the table."

"Yes, do," insisted Allison. "Mother said this morning that she thought it would be a fine plan for us to take up some good book and read it in turn while we work."

As all the girls agreed, Ida picked up the magazine and began turning the leaves.

"What will you have?" she asked. "This scientific article doesn't look very entertaining, and this football story wouldn't interest anybody but boys. We can't plunge into the middle of this serial without having read the first chapters, and, judging from the illustrations and the name of this girl's story, it is anything but wildly exciting."

She glanced hastily over the remaining pages, and then laid the magazine aside. "I wonder," she said, hesitatingly, "if any of you have ever read a book I have in my room, called 'The Fortunes of Daisy Dale.' It's the sweetest thing; I nearly cried my eyes out over part of it. Of course it's

a novel, and some people object to them unless they're by some great writer like Thackeray or Scott. I know my aunt does. But I don't see how this could hurt anybody. It's about a dear little English girl whose guardian kept her almost like a prisoner, so that he could use her money. She had such a hard time that she ran away and got a place as a governess when she was only sixteen. She had all sorts of trouble and misunderstandings, but it ends happily. All the way through she has such a beautiful influence on young Lord Rokeby and Guy Wolvering, the squire's son, who is so wild that his father threatens to disinherit him. It is his love for her that finally reforms him. Her influence over him is a living illustration of the motto of our club."

"Then let's read it," proposed Allison, eagerly.

"Oh, yes, go get it, Ida," called Lloyd and Kitty in the same breath.

"That is, if you don't mind reading it twice yourself," added Betty.

"No, indeed!" answered Ida, rising. "I could read it a dozen times and never tire of it."

In a moment she was back from her room, carrying the book in one hand and dragging a rocking-chair behind her with the other. She drew it up

to one of the windows, and pushing the curtains farther aside, sat down and began to read, to the pattering accompaniment of the rain-drops on the pane. She was a good reader, the best in the seminary, and her well modulated voice would have lent a charm to any story; but the expression she threw into this made it seem as if she were recounting her own personal troubles.

She had not read half a chapter before Lloyd understood why it seemed so. Ida was putting herself in Daisy Dale's place. Instead of the unjust guardian there was the unreasonable aunt. Instead of the squire's son, Edwardo; and the stolen meetings and the smuggled letters and the pearl Daisy wore in secret recalled the confidences of the night in the orchard, and many that had been whispered to her since.

The Shadow Club forgot where they were presently. They ceased to notice that the cold rain drove faster and faster against the windows. They were treading a winding path across a sunny English meadow with Daisy and her lover. It was Junetime where they wandered. The hawthorn hedges were budding white, and even the crevices of the old stone wall flaunted its bloom wherever a cluster of "London pride" could find a foothold.

In a little while Katie's crochet-work slipped into her lap unheeded. With chin in hands and elbows on her knees, she leaned forward, listening with rapt attention. Betty laid down her embroidery-hoops, and Kitty and Allison stopped painting. It was a wild, stormy night now, and they were suffering with Daisy, as with clasped hands and streaming eyes she turned her back on her old home, driven out to seek her own living by her guardian's unbearable tyranny.

Lloyd's cheeks burned redder and redder as the story went on, and Daisy Dale, established as governess at Cameron Hall, again met Guy Wolvering and listened to his vows of deathless devotion. She wondered how Ida could read on so calmly when some of those scenes had been her own experience. She wondered what the girls would say if they knew all that she knew. Then she wondered how it would feel to be the heroine in such scenes, and be the idol of some one's whole existence, as Daisy Dale was of Guy Wolvering's, as Ida was of Edwardo's.

"Oh, don't stop!" begged five eager voices, when Ida finally laid down the book.

"I must. It's nearly dark, and my throat is tired. Do you realize I have been reading all afternoon?"

"Oh, it didn't seem more than five minutes!"

exclaimed Katie. "I never was so interested in anything in my life. I am wild to hear the end."

"Girls!" cried Allison, tragically, starting up from her chair. "I wish you'd look at that clock! We haven't made the candy, and we've scarcely worked at all this whole afternoon, and now it's time to go home."

"But how can we?" queried Kitty. "It's simply pouring. Look at those windows. The rain is coming in torrents."

"We'll have to stay all night," laughed Katie. "Wouldn't it be fun if we could?"

"You can," cried Lloyd, seizing the suggestion eagerly. "I'm sure that the matron would be willing. There's plenty of extra rooms on Satahday night; there's two right heah in this wing. All you have to do is to telephone home and ask yoah mothahs. I'm suah they'll let you, because it's such dreadful weathah. Come on, let's go and ask now. Then we can make the candy befoah suppah, and finish the book befoah bedtime."

With the pouring rain as an excuse, it was easy to obtain the matron's permission for them to stay, and she herself telephoned to Mrs. Walton and Mrs. Mallard, explaining the situation and assuring them that the girls would be well taken care of.

Both mothers gave consent so thankfully that the matron turned away from the telephone feeling that her hospitable insistence had made these ladies her friends for life; and she bustled away well pleased with herself, to put fresh sheets on the beds in the empty rooms in the west wing.

The Clark sisters' room, next to Lloyd and Betty's, had a closet built opposite theirs into the same partition-wall, in the deep space beside the chimney. When both doors were closed no sound penetrated from one room to the other, but if either were left ajar, any one happening to step into either closet could hear quite distinctly what was said on the other side.

The matron, opening the closet door on her side of the wall to fold away some blankets that she had just taken from the beds, heard Lloyd on the other side hunting for the bottle of alcohol for the chafing-dish. Then Katie's voice came piping through high and shrill:

"Wasn't it sweet of Mrs. Bond to telephone herself and insist on our being allowed to stay? If I had been at the telephone mamma would have said that she would send the carriage and I needn't get wet, and could come home just as well as not. But she was willing to accept an invitation from

headquarters. I'm going to save Mrs. Bond some of my fudge. She's just the dearest thing that ever was."

"I shall save her some, too," said Kitty. "I'd like to give her a good big squeeze for being so kind to us."

Mrs. Bond stepped out into the room again with a pleased smile on her motherly face. As she went down-stairs she began revolving a plan in her mind for the evening entertainment of these appreciative little guests which she thought would give them still greater pleasure. Scarcely had she gone when another listener took her place. This time the eavesdropping was intentional.

Mittie Dupong, crossing over to the west wing to borrow a magazine from Betty, saw the sign on the corridor door. Knowing what such signs usually mean at five o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, she softly turned the knob and stepped into the narrow hall. A delicious smell of boiling candy came floating down toward her from Lloyd's room, and a peal of laughter, in which she distinguished first Allison's voice, then Kitty's and Katie's. She felt a trifle piqued at being left out of the merry-making.

"I wonder who else is in there," she thought,

"SHE COULD HEAR EVERY WORD OF THE CONVERSATION."

slipping on toward the keyhole. Just as she was about to stoop and peep in, a sudden noise inside as of some one coming toward her made her draw back. The door into the Clark girls' room stood open. She darted in and waited breathlessly. Lloyd was coming out into the hall, saying, "Never mind about the lamp-chimney; I'll get Cassie's."

Mittie had barely time to spring into the closet when Lloyd entered, took the lamp from the table, and carried it back to her own room. Crouched down in her dark hiding-place Mittie discovered that the closet was a far better situation for eavesdropping than the keyhole. She could hear every word of the conversation without the risk of being detected.

Evidently the girls were discussing some story that they had been reading, and a very sentimental one at that. A wicked little gleam of triumph came into Mittie's eyes as she listened. For here were Lloyd and Allison and Kitty and Katie Mallard and Betty, actually teasing each other about the boys they liked best. And it hadn't been a week since Lloyd had said, with a scornful little toss of her head, "Oh, Mittie, you make me ti'ahed! Always talking about the boys!" and the four of them had

walked off with their arms around each other as if quite disgusted.

"Oh, won't I get even with them now for turning up their noses at me!" exclaimed Mittie to herself, and she pressed her ear closer to the thin partition wall that divided the two closets.

Katie's voice came first: "If I'd been Daisy Dale I'd have fallen in love with Lord Rokeby instead of the Squire's son, because he was tall and fair and blue-eyed."

"Like Charlie Downs," put in Kitty, mischievously. "Oh, girls! Look at her blush!"

"I'm not blushing," protested Katie, wildly.

"But you can't deny that he's the one," insisted Kitty. "Even when we were little and used to play 'lady come to see' you always played that you were Mrs. Downs, you know you did."

"I don't care," pouted Katie. "I don't do it now, and anyhow I don't keep an old dead rose and a valentine and a brass button all tied up in a fancy box with blue ribbon, the way you do, because Guy Ferris gave them to you. N-ow, who's blushing?"

"Katie Mallard, that's something you promised you'd never tell as long as you live!" cried Kitty. "I didn't think you'd be so mean as to go back on your promise." She turned away with such an of-

fended air that Katie saw that her teasing had gone farther than she intended. She hastened to make amends, for she couldn't be happy while there was the slightest misunderstanding between her and her best friend.

"I didn't think you'd care, Kitty. Truly I didn't. I wouldn't have teased you before the other girls, but just here, in our own little club, it oughtn't to make any difference. Why, I don't mind one bit telling you girls that I like Charlie Downs better than any boy I know, and that I felt glad when my apple parings made his initials every time I threw them over my shoulder on Hallowe'en. I don't think it's anything to confess that much, or to care for things a boy gives you as you do for the valentine and the rose. That's a very different matter from talking about the boys as Mittie Dupong does about Carter Brown."

"Well I should think so!" exclaimed Lloyd, in a tone that made Mittie, on the other side of the wall, set her teeth together angrily. "But Mittie isn't like the girls we've always gone with. She's so *common! She* plays *kissing-games.* I've nevah had any use for her since Cartah Brown's birthday pahty. When they played Pillow and Post-office, every boy in the room kissed her, and Lollie Briggs and all that

set of girls that she goes with. I couldn't undahstand it. Some of them seemed so nice; Flynn Willis, you know, and Caddie Bailey. I wouldn't have thought it of them."

"I think they are all nice girls," said Betty, "even Mittie. It's just because they have been brought up that way. They've all come from little towns where such games are the custom, and they really don't know any better. Don't be so fierce about it, Lloyd. One of the girls at our table ate with her knife when she first came, and took her soup out of the end of her spoon, and picked her pie up in her fingers. But she's as ladylike in her manners as anybody now. She simply hadn't been taught how to eat. Those girls will change, too, probably in time."

"But this is different," persisted Lloyd. "I know whom you mean. It was that little Prosser girl. But for all her bad table mannahs she was a lady at heart. *She* didn't take part in those games, and she wouldn't allow a boy to take such a liberty with her as to kiss her, any moah than one of us girls would, that had been brought up heah in the Valley. I'll always be glad we didn't ask Mittie or any of that set to join our club. They may be all right, but if they don't want to be considahed common they

oughtn't to do things that make them seem so, and that are considahed so by the best society."

The blue blood of an old patrician family, proud of its traditions and proud of its generations of gentle breeding was coursing hotly through the Little Colonel's veins as she spoke. Mittie could imagine how she looked as she stood there passing judgment, her head haughtily lifted, a flush on the high-bred little face. The mortified eavesdropper could not feel that she had really done anything wrong at the party, for as Betty had said, such games were always played in the country place where she came from, even in the presence of grown people. And the sport was often rough and boisterous, as it is among the peasant class of the older countries. But measuring herself by Lloyd's exacting standard, she somehow felt that she had been found sadly wanting, and she angrily resented the verdict of this little patrician, who, dainty and refined to the very finger-tips, made her seem less of a lady, less worthy of respect than herself.

The next instant Lloyd's scornful tone changed to one of cheerful sweetness, as she called, "Bring the buttered plates, Betty, please. The fudge is ready to pour out."

Hiding there in the dark closet, Mittie heard many

things during the next half-hour, which she stored away in her memory for future repetition. The secret of the Shadow Club was one, for they discussed it freely, regretting that they had accomplished so little that afternoon, and discussing the place of the next meeting.

With the curtains drawn, and the red lamp-shade casting a soft rosy glow over the room, it seemed a time for confidences. The rain came harder and harder in stormy gusts against the windows, but the curtains that shut out the night seemed to shut them in with the warmth and cheer of the cosy room. As they drew their chairs around the table, rocking comfortably back and forth, with the candy passing from hand to hand, they felt more closely drawn together themselves than they ever had before. And they talked of things they had never mentioned to each other before. "The Fortunes of Daisy Dale" had turned their thoughts toward the far-off future, and standing before its closed gate as if it were the portal to some unexplored Paradise, they questioned each other with eager wondering, as to what might lie in store for them on the other side.

"Well," exclaimed Katie, at length, "when I grow up, I hope the man who proposes to me will do it just as Guy did. I think it's so pretty, that scene

in the cherry lane." She quoted, softly: "'The cherry lane is all in bridal white, my Marguerite, and when it blooms again I'll come to claim my bride — my pearl.'"

"I wonder if they all talk that way," mused Kitty.

"Of course not," said Betty, with a laugh. "It wouldn't fit in most cases. Imagine old Mr. Andrews calling his little black skinny wife his Jane Maria, his pearl! I suppose most people do it in as commonplace a way as Laurie proposed to Amy, in 'Little Women.'"

"I'm going to ask papa what *he* said," declared Katie.

Then the supper-bell rang, and Mittie heard no more. As soon as it was safe to venture from her hiding-place, she followed them down to the dining-room.

Anxious to get back to the reading of the book, the members of the Shadow Club could hardly conceal their disappointment when Mrs. Bond invited them into her parlour after supper, to try some new games which she thought would interest them. Under the circumstances they felt it would be impolite to refuse. They whispered to each other that they would slip

away early, but one thing after another kept them, and it was bedtime before they started up-stairs.

"Oh, I'm so dreadfully disappointed!" wailed Katie; "I won't be able to sleep a wink to-night for wondering how that story is going to end."

"We'll never have such a good chance to finish it again," said Allison, "and even if Ida should loan us the book, we'll not enjoy it as much as if she could read it to us. Her reading adds so much to it."

Kitty expressed the same opinion, and openly envied Lloyd and Betty, who, being in the same building, might have future opportunities which would be denied them. At last Ida proposed that they finish the book after the curfew signal, and preparations were hastily made.

As soon as Kitty and Katie were ready for bed, they took possession, as before, of Lloyd's bed. Lloyd and Betty climbed into the one on the other side of the room. Allison carried blankets and pillows from the next room to the divan, where she made herself comfortable, and Ida, putting a heavy woollen bathrobe over her night-dress, and stretching out in a steamer-chair with a shawl over her, began to read. There was a golf cape draped over the transom. Paper was stuffed in the keyholes, the

outside shutters were tightly closed, the blinds drawn, and the curtains pinned together over them, so that not a single telltale ray of light could betray them to the outside world. Three lamps stood in a row on the table, so that they might be burned in turn, and no one of them be found with the oil entirely consumed in the morning.

Everywhere in the big building was silence and sleep, save in that one room in the west wing. There Ida's voice went musically on, and, with eyes wide open and every sense alert, the girls lay and listened. The rain still poured on, and the wind rattled the casements. Down-stairs the clock struck ten, eleven, twelve; but not till the bride-bells rang out in the last chapter from the steeple of the little stone church in the English village did they lose interest for a moment in the "Fortunes of Daisy Dale." The beautiful ending was something for them to dream over for weeks. It was Sunday morning before Ida and the three guests stole to their rooms, and crept shivering between the cold sheets.

CHAPTER X.

A PLOT

"If there's anything I *loathe* it's a sneak and a telltale!" The Little Colonel's voice rang out so clearly that the girls in the cloak-room stopped to listen.

It was Monday morning, and the pupils were assembling in the chapel for opening exercises. Lloyd stood near the door, the centre of an indignant little group, which cast scornful glances at another little group, whispering together by one of the windows.

"It's the most contemptible thing that evah happened in the seminary," Lloyd continued. "It's a disgrace to have such a girl in school."

Katie, who had been anxiously watching the cloak-room door for the last five minutes, for the appearance of Allison and Kitty, suddenly exclaimed, "There they are now, hanging up their wraps. Let's hurry and tell them before school begins!"

The next instant the two late comers found themselves in a corner, hemmed in by Betty, Katie, and Lloyd, all so indignant that they could scarcely make themselves understood.

"Girls," began Lloyd, in a voice quavering with anger, "you nevah heard anything so outrageous! Satahday aftahnoon, all that time we were making fudge up in our room, somebody was hiding in the closet next to ours, listening to every word we said!"

"How do you know?" gasped Kitty, remembering with dismay several speeches she had made, which would sound decidedly foolish if repeated.

"Lollie Briggs said so. We'd hardly got into the room this mawning when some of the girls began to laugh and repeat every word we had said."

"It's all over the school about our Shadow Club," chimed in Betty, "and think how hard we tried to keep it secret! And the very girls who would have been glad to join, if they had been invited in the first place, are making fun of it. They keep pointing to the ground behind us, and pretend to be amazed at what they see there. Of course they are referring to our shadows, for they make all sorts of spiteful little side remarks about them."

"But there's something worse than that," added

Katie, almost tearfully. "I'll never hear the last of the speech I made about Charlie Downs and the apple-paring initials. Oh, you just wait! They've got hold of every foolish little thing we teased each other about that afternoon; Guy Ferris's valentine and brass button, and the little silver arrow Malcolm MacIntyre gave Lloyd years ago, and all we said about the way we'd like to be proposed to, you know — when we were talking about the 'Fortunes of Daisy Dale.' They're telling it all over the school, and making us appear too ridiculous for any use."

"Who could be mean enough to hide and listen?" exclaimed Allison, indignantly. "The sneak!"

"Say snake, while you're about it," hissed Kitty. "They're spelled with the same letters.

"We haven't any idea," answered Betty, "or why the girls who are doing the most teasing and talking should take such a spiteful pleasure in it. They've seemed so friendly always, until this morning."

"Come, girls," called Mrs. Clelling, in passing. "It's time for the silence bell."

Hurrying out of the cloak-room, they took their places in chapel, and obediently opened their song-books at the signal, but it is doubtful if any member of the Shadow Club could have told afterward what

was sung that morning. The letter in Ida's chatelaine-bag, which Lloyd had smuggled to her soon after breakfast, on her return from the post-office, absorbed all her thoughts. The other five girls were busy with the one question: "Who could have been such a sneak as to listen and tell?"

There were six bad records in every recitation that the club made that morning. Notes flew back and forth, and anxious eyes watched the clock, eager for recess to come. At the first signal, Lloyd flew to Ida, but before she could outline the plan of action she and Allison had decided upon in the history class, Ida said, hurriedly, "Oh, Princess, that letter has upset me so I don't know whether I'm walking on earth or air. I'll tell you to-morrow — something awfully important, but I've got to plan something now, so I must go off by myself and put on my thinking-cap. Oh, I'm all in a flutter."

Wondering what news the letter could have contained to bring such a becoming flush to Ida's face, and such a glow of happiness in the beautiful violet eyes, Lloyd turned away disappointed. But she forgot both the wonder and the disappointment a few minutes later, as she and Allison walked up and down in front of the seminary arm in arm. Kitty and Katie were just behind them. Betty had not

yet come out, having stopped at the sight of Janie Clung's tears to explain a problem in arithmetic.

Lollie Briggs, Flynn Willis, and Caddie Bailey stood on the front steps, and each girl who came out of the hall was called into their midst, and told something with many significant glances toward the four pacing back and forth past them in a fine unconcern.

Presently Caddie called out in a voice intended for them to hear, "I wonder if anybody can guess this conundrum. Nell, can you?"

The question was addressed to one of the older girls who came out of the front door just then, without a wrap around her. It was a frosty morning, and every one else had either a jacket or cloak.

"Wait till I run back and get my golf cape," she cried. "I didn't know it was so cold."

"Now look out," whispered Allison to Lloyd. "They're going to say something to her to try to set her against us. They're stopping everybody who comes out. That makes eight already they've set to whispering and looking at us, all standing there in that crowd on the steps."

Nell came out again, hugging her golf cape around her, and stood on the top step. "Well, what's your conundrum?" she asked, good-naturedly.

Caddie slightly raised her voice. "What's the difference between a person who wouldn't stoop to 'anything so common as a kissing-game,' and a person who would get up a goody-goody club, pretending it was for the benefit of the poor, and yet all the time be using it simply as an excuse to meet and read silly novels on the sly, and talk about the boys, and roast the other girls behind their backs, whom they considered 'too common' to associate with them?"

In a flash Lloyd realized what had offended Caddie, and what was the cause of her covert sneers. Whoever it was who had played the sneak had taken pains to report every word she had said about the girls who had played Pillow at Carter Brown's party. She looked around to see who had been the most active in denouncing the club. There they were on the steps, Flynn Willis, Caddie Bailey, Lollie Briggs, all but Mittie Dupong. The same girls she had called common, because they had allowed the boys to take a liberty which she thought cheapened them. She knew now why they were so spiteful in their remarks. Before Nell could gather her wits together for a reply, Lloyd sprang forward, her eyes flashing.

"Why don't you come straight out and say what

you mean, Cad Bailey?" she cried. "You're only telling part of the truth. Now I'll tell it all. I did say behind your backs that I thought it was common to play kissing-games, and now I say it to yoah faces. I can't help thinking it. I've been brought up that way, and if you've been brought up differently, then you've a right to think yoah way. If I've hurt yoah feelings, I beg yoah pahdon, but I have a right to express my opinion in my own room to my best friends. We were *not* 'roasting' anybody. We only made a criticism that you must expect to have made on you, whenevah you do things that *are* common. And what are you going to say about the person who hid and listened all aftahnoon? *Somebody* was sneak enough not only to hide in a closet and betray secrets that no girl of honah would have listened to, but she misrepresented the club in repeating them."

Lloyd's temper was rapidly getting the best of her, but in the middle of her anger she seemed to hear her father saying, in the playful way in which he used to warn her long ago, "Look out, little daughter, the tiger is getting loose." She stopped short.

"Who did that?" cried Nell. "I didn't suppose there was such a dishonourable girl in the school."

"Neither did I," answered Flynn Willis, quickly. "I never stopped to ask how the report started. I was so mad at being talked about that I did just what Cad Bailey told me to do, repeated everything I was told, just to tease the club and get even."

All eyes were turned inquiringly to Caddie Bailey.

"I don't know how it started," she cried. "Honestly I don't. Lollie Briggs told me. She and several girls were talking about it this morning before breakfast, out in the hall. They were all furious, and they told me lots of things to say that would tease Lloyd and the rest of them nearly to death. I was mad, too, but I don't know who told in the first place."

"It was you, Lollie Briggs, who told me that somebody had hid in the Clark girls' closet," cried Lloyd. "You know you did, when I demanded to know who had started all this talk. Who was it?"

"I promised I wouldn't tell," said Lollie, sullenly, "and I won't. You needn't ask, for no power on earth could drag it out of me. So there!"

"It's like the story of Chicken Little," laughed Nell. "'Who told you, Goosey-Lucy? Ducky-Lucky. Who told you, Ducky-Lucky? Henny-Penny. Who told you, Henny-Penny?' Seems to

me I'd make it my business to find out who this particularly contemptible Chicken Little happens to be, before I'd report any more of her tales."

Nell swept back into the hall, and, as the four girls started to resume their walk, Betty knocked on the cloak-room window, beckoning violently for them to come inside. They ran in pell-mell and shut the door behind them.

"I've found out!" cried Betty, in a tragic whisper. "It was Mittie Dupong! Cassie found her class-badge on their closet floor, and just now brought it down to her. She denied it was hers, but there's no mistaking that queer little stick-pin and chain fastened to it that she uses as a guard. She's the only one in school who has one like that — an owl's head in a wishbone, you know. Besides, there were her initials, M. D., on the under side of the badge. Cassie turned it over and showed them to her. She took it, then, but denied having been in the closet, and was so confused and contradicted herself so many times that anybody could see that she felt caught and was telling a story. She even vowed that she hadn't been near the west wing for a week. Then she ran out and banged the door, but Janie Clung said, 'Oh, what a story! I met her

coming out of there Saturday night, on the way down to supper.' "

"What do you think we ought to do about it?" asked Katie. That was a question no one could answer. In the first flush of their indignation, it seemed to them that nothing they could do to Mittie would be sufficient punishment for such an act of meanness. They felt that she was a disgrace to the school, and decided that they would be conferring a benefit on the seminary if they could succeed in getting rid of her.

Even Betty failed for the time to remember the "Road of the Loving Heart" she was trying to leave behind her in every one's memory; and, if the little talisman on her finger pricked her tender conscience once or twice, she silenced it with the reflection that it was her duty to help punish the doer of such a contemptible deed. The name of the club finally suggested the means.

"She told all the secrets of the Shadow Club, and spoiled it," said Katie. "Now we just ought to shadow *her*. Haunt her, you know, like the Ku Klux Klan, or the White Caps, so she'll leave school and be afraid to listen again as long as she lives."

"Yes," agreed Kitty. "We'll *hoodoo* her. That is the way."

Such a plan never would have been thought of in a Northern school. Even in this little Kentucky seminary it is doubtful if it could have been carried out had not previous events paved the way. There was scarcely a pupil in the school whose earliest impressions had not been tinged in some degree by the superstitions of some old coloured nurse or family servant. Even Lloyd had not escaped them entirely, in spite of all her mother's watchful care. Mom Beck knew better than to talk of such things openly before her, but she had hinted of them to the other servants in her presence, till Lloyd had a vague uneasiness when she dreamed of muddy water, or spilled the salt, or saw a bird flying against a window. From babyhood such happenings had been associated in her mind with Mom Beck's portents of ill-luck.

There was not a coloured person in the neighbourhood who could have explained why so many graves in the negro cemetery had bottles or fruit-jars placed upon them, inside of which were carefully sealed the whitest of chicken feathers. Undoubtedly they were the relic of some old African fetish, and a reverence for them had been handed down from grizzled grandsire to little pickaninny since the beginning of the slave-trade. In the same

way had come all those other superstitions at which white people laughed, but which influenced many of them also to some extent. For many a man who scoffed most, felt more comfortable when he saw the new moon in an open sky than when he caught first sight of it through the trees; and more than one, having once started on a journey, would not have turned back, no matter what important thing was left behind, preferring to do without at any cost or inconvenience rather than risk the ill-luck the turning back would bring.

Lloyd knew more than one housekeeper in the neighbourhood who, for the same reason, would not allow the ashes emptied after sundown, or an umbrella to be raised in the house; and who would turn pale if a mirror was broken or a picture fell from the wall or a dog howled in the night.

Probably not a pupil in the school would have admitted that she believed in ghosts, yet few would have been brave enough to venture into the cellar at night after Mary Phillips's encounter with the spirit of the "veiled lady" on Hallowe'en. That had been a frequent topic of conversation since that night, and had done much to prepare the way for the plot the club concocted.

So Kitty's proposition was received with enthu-

siasm. The performance began next day when she slipped up behind Mittie in the cloak-room, and solemnly touched her three times in quick succession on the left ear with something she held in her hand. It felt soft and furry, and Mittie, who had a horror of caterpillars, gave a little shriek as she put up her handkerchief to brush it away.

Kitty had already disappeared into the chapel, but Katie was waiting, ready to begin her part of the performance.

"Did you see that?" she said to Janie Clung, in an awed tone, just loud enough for Mittie to hear, and yet low enough to seem confidential.

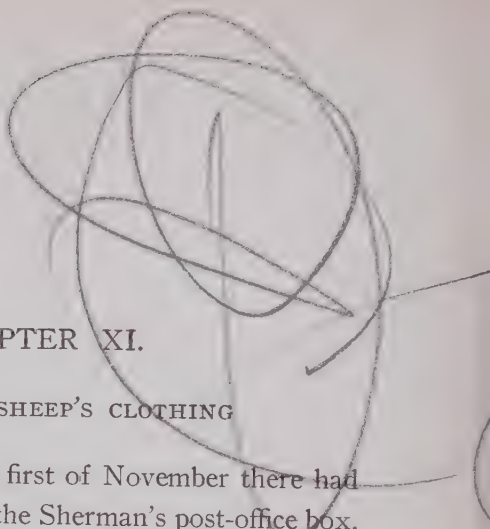
"I know people who would go stark, raving crazy if that was done to them. What for? I thought everybody knew what for. My old nurse used to say that to be touched three times on the ear by the left hind foot of a rabbit that had been killed in a graveyard in the dark of the moon by a cross-eyed person, was the worst luck anybody could have." She lowered her voice a trifle. *"It's a hoodoo-mark! You're marked for the haunts to follow you!"*

"The what?" asked another girl who stood near.

"The haunts — ghosts — you know. Jim Briddle calls them 'ha'nts.' Nobody could be more cross-

eyed than he is, and he's the one who gave that rabbit's foot to Ranald Walton, and Ranald gave it to Kitty. I should think that Mittie Dupong would feel mighty creepy if she knew what's ahead of her."

Mittie heard and did feel creepy, although she shrugged her shoulders and tried hard to appear unconcerned. The fact that the club seemed to place so much reliance in the hoodoo made a strong impression on Janie Clung, and gave it a weight it would not have possessed otherwise when the occurrence was repeated to the other girls. Before the week was over it was whispered around the school that the charm was really working.



CHAPTER XI.

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

EVERY day since the first of November there had been a letter for Ida in the Sherman's post-office box, under cover of Lloyd's address. Lloyd had grown to dread the afternoon walks with the school, for she was in a flutter of nervousness from the moment they came in sight of the post-office until the letter was safe in Ida's possession. There was always the fear that Betty might get to the window first, or that she might catch sight of the envelope, addressed with many flourishes in a big, bold hand; or that that letter might be the only one, as it often was, and Betty might wonder why Lloyd's face should grow so red when she answered, "No, nothing for us this time."

It was easier to manage after the weather turned cold enough to furnish an excuse for carrying a muff, but even then she fancied that Miss Mattie looked at her curiously sometimes, when she thrust

the daily letter hastily out of sight without a second glance. She never went through the performance without wishing that it might be the last time that she should be placed in such an uncomfortable position; but afterward she always reproached herself for making such a wish. It seemed a very poor friendship that could not stand a little test like that. It was such a small thing to do when the happiness of her friend's whole life was at stake.

Then she had her reward in the evenings, when Ida, with her arms around her, whispered her undying gratitude, or read her extracts from her letters, which gave her glimpses into a romance far more beautiful than the "Fortunes of Daisy Dale," or the "Heiress of Dorn," or any of the others they had read since.

A sort of circulating library had started since the rainy night the Shadow Club read its first volume. Ida had a pile of paper-covered books in her closet which she pronounced fully as interesting as the one she had read aloud; so "Elsie's Wooing," "Fair but False," and the "Heiress of Dorn" began passing in turn from the covers of Katie's geography to Kitty's, and from Lloyd's history to Betty's and Allison's. They read at recess, they read before school, and more than once some

exciting chapter proved too interesting to be laid aside in study time for the work of the hour.

After a few volumes of such tales, Betty became fired with an ambition to write one herself, and soon became so absorbed in her pastime that she could think of little else. Eugene was the name of her hero, and Gladys was the maiden who combined all the beauty and virtues possible for one mundane creature to possess. The whole club was consulted as to the colour of her eyes and hair, and many points about which the little author was undecided. They came in time to regard Eugene and Gladys as real personages, in whom they had a family interest. Lloyd had bits of the story read to her sometimes when they were getting ready for bed. Betty lost interest in everything to such an extent that she ceased to be sociable, and spent most of her time alone, dreaming out different scenes in the story, which filled her mind to the exclusion of even her lessons.

One afternoon, near the middle of November, Lloyd, hurrying through the lower hall with an open letter in her hand, met the president.

"Oh, Doctah Wells!" she exclaimed. "I was just going to yoah room. Heah is a note mothah sent you in the lettah that came to-day. She has

written for some things she needs, and wants Betty and me to walk up to Locust aftah school with a message to the servants about packing them, if you'll excuse us from the regulah promenade."

"Certainly," he answered, glancing over Mrs. Sherman's gracefully written request.

"But Betty has such a bad cold," continued Lloyd, "that the matron thinks she oughtn't to go out to walk to-day, and it's lonely going back home by myself, when it's all shut up. May I take Ida Shane with me instead? She's nevah seen Locust from the inside, and I'd love to show it to her. You know," a little smile dimpling her face as she spoke, "I can't help being proud of the old place."

"You have good reason," said the professor, smiling back at her kindly. "It is certainly a beautiful old homestead. Yes, I have no objection to Ida's going with you."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Lloyd. She hurried up the stairs to Ida's room, calling excitedly as she reached the door, "Yes, he says you may go. Hurry and put on your things so that we can have as long time as possible up there."

Betty had gone into the matron's room in her absence. It took Lloyd only a moment to slip into

her hat and coat. Then catching up her muff and thrusting it under her arm, she started back to Ida's room, buttoning her gloves as she went. Ida had taken down her hair and was deliberately rearranging it before the mirror.

"Oh, what did you do that for?" cried Lloyd, half-impatiently. "It looked all right as it was. We're not going to see any one but the servants. There's no use wearing your best hat." She glanced at the mass of velvet and plumes lying on the bed. "Just pin your hair up any fashion and stick on your mortar-board. That'll do."

"Shut the door, please," said Ida, in a low tone. "I have something to tell you." She bent nearer the mirror, drawing the comb through the fluffy pompadour. "We *are* going to see some one this afternoon. *Edwardo is in the Valley.*"

Lloyd dropped her muff at this surprising announcement, but Ida went on, calmly. "I've been expecting him for several days. He comes to Lloydsboro sometimes to visit his cousin. I've lain awake nights trying to arrange some way to see him. This is a thousand times better than any way I could think of. I'm the luckiest girl that ever lived to have such a friend as you to plan for me, Princess."

"I don't know what you mean," exclaimed Lloyd. "I haven't planned anything."

"No, not intentionally, but look how easy you have made it for me to have an interview. He'll be on the watch for the seminary girls to pass by the store, for I was to manage to leave a note there for him, telling him where I can see him. All I have to do now is to signal him to follow, and we can have a good long talk at Locust while you are giving the servants their orders. You don't mind, do you?" she asked, as Lloyd continued to stare at her without saying anything.

"No. Oh, no! Of co'se not," answered Lloyd, with a confused laugh. "Only it makes me feel so que'ah to think that I'm really going to see him. It's just as if Lord Rokeby or the squire's son had stepped out of the book. I feel as if I were in a book myself since you told me that. This is the way it would be on the page, if we could stand off and read about ourselves: 'And Violet's little friend led the way down the long avenue, and there on the threshold of her home, after months of cruel separation, the reunited lovers kept their tryst.'"

Ida laughed happily. "You'll have a book written before Betty is half-started if you go on at that rate. Now tell me. Do I look all right?"

She was settling the big picture-hat in place over her soft hair as she anxiously asked the question. Lloyd regarded her critically, tipping her head a trifle to one side as she looked.

"Put your hat a hairbreadth farther over your face," she exclaimed. "There! That's lovely. Oh, Violet, that shade of velvet is *so* becoming to you. It's just the colah of yoah eyes. I nevah saw you look so beautiful."

A becoming pink flushed Ida's cheeks. She bent her head over the bunch of violets pinned on the lapel of her coat. "It's dear of you to think so," she said, "and it's dear of you to send me these violets every week. These are unusually sweet. I'm so glad I have a fresh bunch for to-day — this happy day."

Lloyd took the keenest delight in watching the graceful girl sweep down the hall ahead of her. From the plumes of the picture-hat to the hem of her stylish gown she thoroughly satisfied Lloyd's artistic instinct for the beautiful. She gave her arm an adoring little squeeze as they passed down the stairs together.

Out on the road she glanced up at Ida again. Happiness had not made her radiant, as it did Daisy Dale, but there was a soft light in the violet

eyes which made Lloyd think of a picture she had seen of a vestal maiden on her way to guard the holy altar fires.

Lloyd's heart began to beat faster as she realized that every step was taking them nearer to Edwardo. She pictured him again in her imagination, as she had done so many times before. She would know that pale, serious face with its flashing eyes anywhere she might meet him, she was sure.

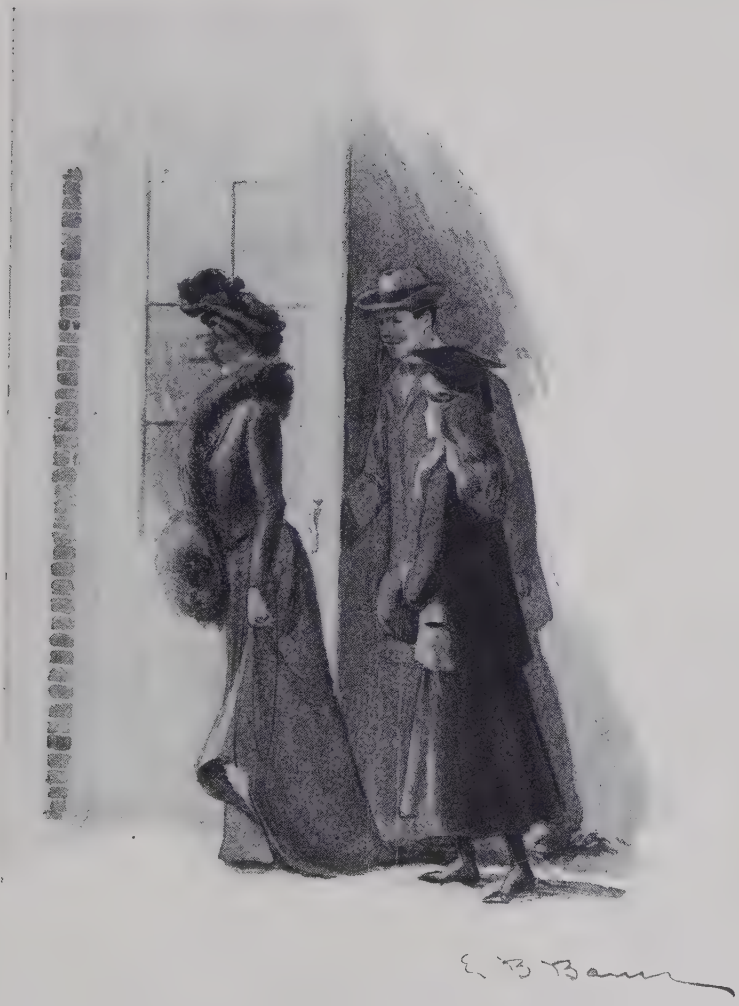
Neither of them spoke as they hurried along the path through the lower part of Clovercroft and pushed open the woodland gate. But as they stepped up on the platform in front of the depot, Lloyd said, "Let's cross the track heah, and go up on the othah side of the road. Then we'll not have to pass the waiting-rooms. There's always so many people loafing around the window of the telegraph-office."

Instinctively she felt that while a little girl like herself would attract no attention, Ida in her long sweeping dress that she held up so gracefully, and the big hat drooping over her pretty face, and the stylish fur collar, and the violets on her coat, made a picture that any one would turn to look at twice. She could not bear to think of the bold glances that might be cast after her by the loafers around the depot. It seemed to her little short of sacrilege,

although she could not have put the feeling into words, for any eyes but Edwardo's to rest upon her as she went on her way to this meeting with that vestal-maiden look upon her face.

"Very well," assented Ida. "You know we want to stop at the store. I want to get some chocolate creams if they have any fresh ones."

Lloyd's heart gave a frightened thump as she remembered that it was in the store that Edwardo would be watching presently for the seminary girls to go by. It was half an hour earlier than they usually passed, but there was a possibility that he might be there. In less than a minute she might be face to face with the live hero of a real romance. It was with an odd feeling of mingled relief and disappointment that she glanced around the store and saw only familiar faces. A young man whom she knew by sight was perched on the bookkeeper's high stool at the back of the store, so absorbed in the Louisville evening paper which the last mail-train had brought out that he did not look up. A small coloured boy stood patiently by the stove waiting for his coal-oil can to be filled. One of the clerks was tying up a package of groceries for Frazer to carry over to Clovercroft, and the other was showing ginghams to Mrs. Walton's Barbry.



"HE HELD IT ASIDE FOR THEM BOTH TO PASS THROUGH."

"Be with you in a moment, please," called the first clerk as the girls entered. Lloyd stopped in front of the show-case near the door, and began idly examining the various styles of jewelry and letter-paper displayed within. She had almost decided to invest in a certain little enamelled pin which she knew would delight Mom Beck, and take it up to her as a surprise, when Barbry stepped beside her with a polite greeting and an inquiry about her grandfather's health.

While she was still talking with Barbry, Ida came up flushed and excited. She thrust her bag of chocolates into her muff, and, catching up her skirts, said, hurriedly, "Come on, I'm ready."

Lloyd started at once to follow her to the door, but looked back to nod assent to Barbry's last remark, and in turning again almost ran into the young fellow who had been reading at the book-keeper's desk. He was hurrying after Ida to open the door for her. He held it aside for them both to pass through, and a flush of displeasure dyed Lloyd's face as she saw the admiring glance he cast boldly at Ida.

"He needn't have gone so far out of his way to have done that," exclaimed Lloyd, as they started up the road toward Locust. "It was the clerk's

place to open the doah, and he nearly knocked him down, trying to get there first."

"Who?" inquired Ida, innocently. She was several steps in advance, and could not see Lloyd's face.

"That horrid Mistah Ned Bannon. I can't bea'h him. Papa Jack told mothah she must nevah invite him to the house, undah any circumstances, because he wasn't fit for Betty and me to know, and —"

She stopped abruptly, for Ida turned with a white, pained face.

"Oh, Lloyd!" she cried. "How can you hurt me so? Don't believe any of those dreadful things you hear about him!" Then, seeing from Lloyd's amazed expression that she failed to understand the situation, she added, in a distressed tone, "*He* is *Edwardo.*"

If Ida had struck her on the face she could not have been more amazed. She stood staring at her helplessly, unable to say a word.

"I must be dreaming all this," she thought. "After awhile I'll surely wake up and find I've had a horrible nightmare."

But the distress in Ida's voice was too real to be a dream. She was biting her lips to keep back the tears. After one look into Lloyd's dismayed

face she turned away and began moving slowly on toward Locust. Lloyd walked beside her, mechanically. She could not shake off the feeling that she must be in a dream. From time to time she cast a half-frightened glance toward Ida. She felt that she had wounded her so deeply that nothing she might say could ever make amends. When she saw a tear course slowly down her cheek and splash down on the bunch of flowers on her coat, she clasped her arm impulsively, saying, "Oh, Violet, deah, *don't* cry! I wouldn't have hurt you for worlds. I didn't have the faintest idea that *he* was the one."

"It isn't so much what you said," answered Ida, controlling her voice with an effort, "but I'd counted so much on your friendship for him. And now to know that people have prejudiced you against him before you've had a chance to meet him and find out for yourself that they're mistaken — " She stopped with a sob. "Under all his wild ways he's good and noble and true at heart, and it isn't fair for everybody to condemn him for what he has done, and stand in his way when he's trying so hard to do better."

One little hand in the muff was bare, and Lloyd saw the gleam of the pearl on it as Ida took out

her handkerchief and dabbed it hastily across her eyes. It brought back all that scene in the moonlighted orchard, and Ida's blushing confession: "He says that is what my life means to him — a pearl. That if it wasn't for my love and prayers he wouldn't care what became of him or what he did. Do you blame me for disregarding aunt's wishes?" And again as on that night the Little Colonel's heart swelled with an indignant "No!" Again she arrayed herself beside her friend, ready to do battle for her against the whole world if necessary.

Wonderfully comforted by Lloyd's protests of sympathy and understanding, Ida dried her eyes and looked back over her shoulder, saying, "He's not in sight yet. I told him not to start for fifteen minutes, and then to come the long way, around through Tanglewood, so nobody could think he was following us. That will give you time to show me over the house."

As Lloyd swung open the entrance gate and started down the long avenue, a queer feeling crept over her that she could not have expressed had she tried. It seemed to her that the old trees were almost human, and stretched out their bare branches toward her with an offering of protection and welcome

that was like the greeting of old friends. Yet at the same time she felt the silent challenge of these old family sentinels, and involuntarily answered it by a slight lifting of the head and a trifle more erectness of carriage as she passed. They seemed to expect it of her, that she should walk past them, as all the Lloyds had walked, with the proud consciousness that none could gainsay their countersign of gentle birth and breeding which spoke even in their tread.

It was the first time she had been back to Locust since the beginning of school, and Ida felt some subtile change in her as soon as they passed inside the great gate. The Little Colonel's personality asserted itself as it had not at the seminary. There she was Ida's adoring little shadow, completely under the spell of her influence. Here, swayed by the stronger influence of old associations, she was herself again; the same well-poised, imperious little creature that she was when she first coolly "bearded the lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall," and brought the old Colonel to unconditional surrender.

Mom Beck came up from the servants' cottage and unlocked the house for them, and after reading her the list of articles to be packed, Lloyd left her in the linen-room and began a tour of the house.

In the pleasure of acting as hostess and showing Ida the attractions of Locust, she would have forgotten that an unwelcome guest was on his way, had not Ida's restless glances from every front window they passed, reminded her.

The quarter of an hour was almost over when she led the way into the long drawing-room, which she had reserved until last. "Of co'se it doesn't look as it does when we are living heah. It makes such a difference having the curtains down and the furniture covahed; but I want you to see my harp." She began slipping the cover from the tall burnished frame.

"It belonged to my grandmothah Amanthis, and I am proudah of it than anything I own. That's her portrait ovah the mantel. Isn't she beautiful? Somehow I nevah can call her just grandmothah, as if she were an old lady. She nevah lived to be one, you know. I always have to add her name, Amanthis, and I think of her as she looks there in the pictuah, the young girl she was when grandfathah first saw her, a June rose in her hair and anothah at her throat. 'The fairest flowah in all Kentucky,' he told me once. That's always seemed such a sweet romance to me. She wasn't much oldah than you when he brought her here a bride. He

always talks about her when the locusts bloom, for they were in blossom then, and the avenue was white with them."

Lloyd had expected more outspoken admiration from Ida when she showed her the portrait, and was disappointed to have her barely glance up at it, murmuring, "Yes, she is lovely," in an absent-minded way, and then hurry to the window, exclaiming, "Oh, there he is. I can see him just coming in at the gate."

Lloyd's glance followed Ida's, and, stepping back from the window, she began hastily drawing the cover over the harp.

"Oh, don't put it on yet," said Ida. "I want to show it to him." Lloyd hesitated an instant, then stammered confusedly, "But — but — oh, Ida, I'm *so* sorry, but don't you see, I can't ask him into the house."

"Why not?" cried Ida. "You promised on the way up here you'd do anything you could for me."

Tears of distress gathered in the Little Colonel's eyes. It was impossible to answer Ida's question without wounding her deeply, for it was in this very room she had heard her grandfather say: "It's a pity Cy Bannon's youngest boy is such a profligate. Why, sir, he isn't worth the powder and shot that

would put an end to his worthless existence. I wouldn't let him darken my doors, sir!" And it was in this room also that she had heard her father say: "No, Elizabeth, for the judge's sake I'd like to show Ned some attention, and some families do receive him. But his unprincipled conduct bars him out here. He's a fellow whom I never could permit Lloyd to know."

Ida repeated her question. "Oh, Violet," cried Lloyd, "it's just breaking my heart to refuse you, but I can't let him come in. It isn't my house, and I've no right to when grandfathah and Papa Jack have both forbidden it. But it's warmah on the poa'ch than it is in the house with no fiah, and I'll put some chairs out for you, and wait for you in heah."

"Won't you even come out and be introduced?"

"Oh, Violet, *don't* ask me!" begged the Little Colonel. "I'd like to for your sake, but I can't. I simply can't!"

"Why not? Are you going to let your father's prejudices stand in the way? He doesn't know him as I do. He's just taken a dislike to him as aunt has done on account of things he's heard. It's unfair! It's unjust to condemn him on account of other people's mistaken opinions and prejudices."

The Little Colonel wavered. Ida's absolute trust made it seem possible that she might be right, and everybody else mistaken. She peered out of the window again. He was half-way up the avenue now, sauntering along at a leisurely gait with a cigarette in his mouth.

"Besides," continued Ida, "nobody need ever know you have met him. It's easy enough to keep it secret, so what's the difference — "

She stopped in the middle of her sentence, surprised by the change in the Little Colonel's manner. She had drawn herself up haughtily, and in her fearless scorn bore a strong resemblance to the portrait of the soldier-boy in gray in the frame above her.

"I hope," she said, slowly, "that I have too much respect for the family honah to do such an undahhanded thing as that. Do you think that I'd be willing to be the only one of all the Lloyds who couldn't be trusted?"

"Why, Princess, I don't see what's changed you so suddenly," said Ida. "I haven't asked you to do anything more than you've been doing all along, by letting me use your post-office box."

"But I nevah would have done that," cried Lloyd, "if I'd have known who yoah Edwardo was, and

now I've found out that it is some one that Papa Jack disapproves of, of co'se I can't carry yoah lettahs any moah."

"Oh, Princess, I thought *you'd* stand by me against the whole world!" sobbed Ida. "I had counted so much — just these few days he'll be here in the Valley — on seeing him up here. I didn't think *you'd* be unreasonable and unjust. It seems as if it would break my heart to have my only friend fail me now."

The tears were streaming down Lloyd's face, too, but she clenched her hands and shook her head stubbornly. "No, tell him he can't come heah again, and that he mustn't send any moah lettahs to my address."

Without another word Ida turned and walked out to the porch, where she stood waiting behind the bare vines that twined the pillars for Edwardo to come to her. All the pretty colour had died out of her face, and Lloyd felt in a sudden spasm of remorse that she was responsible for the tears in the beautiful eyes and the look of trouble on the face that only a little while before had been aglow with happiness. The odour of a cigarette floated in through the hall. Then Ida closed the door, and the two sat down on the step outside.

Lloyd paced up and down the long room with her hands behind her back. There was an ache in her throat. She was so miserably disappointed in Edwardo, so miserably sorry for Ida. More than all, she was miserably sorry for herself; for the friendship which she had counted one of the most beautiful things of her life lay in ruins. For a moment she doubted if she had done right to shirk the obligations it had laid upon her, and wondered if it were not a greater sacrifice than her father ought to expect her to make for him. The temptation pressed sorely upon her to go to Ida and tell her she would stand by her as she had promised, and for a few days longer, at least, be the bearer of their letters. She even started toward the door; but half-way across the room some compelling force drew her eyes toward the portrait of Amanthis, and she stood still, looking into the depths of the clear, true eyes which had given counsel to more than one troubled heart.

Years before, the old Colonel, standing with his head bowed on the mantel, had murmured, brokenly, "Oh, Amanthis, tell me what to do!" and, obedient to the silent message of that straightforward gaze, had started off through the falling snow to be reconciled to his only daughter. And now Lloyd,

looking up in the same way, no longer had any doubts about her duty.

"It wouldn't be right, would it!" she murmured. "*You* nevah did anything you had to hide. *You* wouldn't stoop to anything clandestine." She straightened herself up proudly, and wiped her eyes. "Neithah will I, no mattah what it costs me not to!" Then she went on, brokenly, as if talking to a living presence: "Oh, it's so pitiful for her to be so deceived in him; for of co'se grandfathah and Papa Jack and her aunt and everybody put togethah couldn't be mistaken. And I love her so much; I wish mothah were here, or Papa Jack — but I'll promise *you,* Grandmothah Amanthis, I'll nevah make you ashamed of me again. I wouldn't have carried the lettahs if I had known, and you can trust me always aftah this, for evah and evah."

It seemed to Lloyd that an approving smile rested on the girlish face, and a red streak of light from the wintry sunset, stealing in through the uncurtained window, shone across the June rose at her throat till it burned for the moment with the live red of a living rose.

She slipped the cover on the harp again, and taking one more look around the room at every

familiar object grown dear from years of happy associations, she closed the door softly and stole upstairs to rejoin Mom Beck. She felt as if she had been to a funeral and had suddenly grown very old and worldly wise — years older and wiser than when she started blithely up to Locust an hour or two before.

It was late when she and Mom Beck came downstairs again. The sunset glow had almost faded from the sky. They bolted the front door and went out the back, Mom Beck taking the key again.

"Ida is waiting for me on the front poa'ch," Lloyd explained. "Good-bye, Mom Beck. I'm mighty homesick to come back to you all."

"Good-bye, honey," responded the faithful old soul. "I'm going to bring you some prawlines in the mawnin'. Ole Becky knows what'll cheer up her baby."

Lloyd paused at the corner of the porch. "I think we ought to go now," she called.

"In a minute," answered Ida. "I'll catch up with you."

Lloyd walked on slowly by herself, down the avenue, through the gate, beside the railroad track. She was in sight of the depot before Ned Bannon

struck off across a field and Ida joined her. She did not speak as they hurried on toward the seminary, and Lloyd felt, with a desolate sinking of the heart, that the old intimacy could never be resumed.

CHAPTER XII.

GHOST OR GIRL

ALLISON, struggling into her jacket as she ran, hurried along the path through Clovercroft to overtake Kitty and Katie on their way home at noon.

"Wait!" she called, waving her gloves frantically to attract their attention as they looked back from the woodland gate.

"I have some news for you." She was almost breathless when she caught up with them.

"What do you think of this? Ida and Lloyd have had a falling out of some kind. Neither one will say what it's about, but they don't have anything more to do with each other, and Ida has resigned from the Shadow Club. She told me just now to tell you all that she couldn't come any more, and that we might as well invite somebody else to join in her place. She didn't give any reason for leaving, and you know when she puts on that dignified, grown-up air of hers, one doesn't feel at liberty to ask questions. I told her I was sorry, and started

to beg her to change her mind, but she wouldn't listen; just smiled in a mournful sort of way as if she had lost her last friend, and hurried past me.

"I asked Betty if she knew what was the matter, and she said it must be a quarrel of some kind, for Lloyd was dreadfully unhappy. After she came back from Locust yesterday evening she threw herself across the bed and cried, and cried, and wouldn't tell what for. She wouldn't go down to supper, either, and afterward, when Betty fixed her something on the chafing-dish, she barely tasted it."

"We'll have a gay old club meeting to-morrow," said Katie, "with Ida gone and Lloyd in the dumps and Betty unable to come, on account of her cold —"

"And her head so full of the book she's writing that she can't take any interest in anything else," interrupted Kitty. "It's too bad that there's only half a club left. Three of us can't get enough things ready to have a fair by Easter."

"That isn't the worst of it," answered Katie. "The three of us alone never can get even with Mittie Dupong and carry out our hoodoo plot to punish her, because we are all outside of the seminary. I'm tired of having the girls laugh whenever they see me eating an apple and make remarks about C. D."

"And I'm tired of hearing everlastingly about that old valentine!" chimed in Kitty. "If the other girls won't help us I think we ought to act on Ida's suggestion and take in some new members who would."

"Lucy Smith would be glad to join in Ida's place," said Allison. "She rooms across the hall from Mittie, and she'd dare do anything that we would suggest."

"And Retta Long's room is just above, and she's a good friend of ours," added Kitty. "Let's talk it over with Betty and Lloyd as soon as we get back to the seminary after dinner, and if they're willing we'll swear in the new members at recess."

"All right," assented Katie. "I'll hurry back and meet you here at the depot as soon as I get through dinner. We'll settle this before night."

But much running back and forth and consulting and discussing was necessary before the new addition to the club was in full working order. Lloyd and Betty were willing to admit Retta and Lucy, but Retta and Lucy were not willing to join unless their roommates were included in the invitation; and their roommates, Dora Deersly and Rose Parker, were not willing to spend any time in making fancy articles for the fair. It was too near the holidays,

they said. They needed all their spare time for the presents they were trying to finish before Christmas.

"Couldn't they be sort of honorary members, and not have to work?" suggested Kitty. "They needn't even meet with us on Saturdays, if they'll help us play ghost to scare Mittie."

"Yes, there are some secret societies, like the Masons, that have different orders," Allison said. "Why couldn't we have, too? We'll be one kind of shadow, the kind that casts the influence, and the other four can be another kind and do the mischief. We can call ourselves the G. G.'s for good ghosts. Betty, can't you fix up something for the others?"

"Yes," answered Betty, "if you'll give me enough time."

She turned to the little note-book she always carried, and began looking over a list of words on the last page. The girls often laughed at Betty's devotion to the dictionary. Frequently they found her poring over its pages, picking out new words that pleased her fancy, as they would pick out the kernels of a nut, and jotting them down for future use.

"Here it is," she cried, presently, "wraith! It means spirit or apparition. They can be the wicked wraiths — the W. W.'s. No," she added, as another

chosen word caught her eye. "They can be the W. V.'s. Wraiths of Vengeance; that sounds better. That will fit in with the story of the veiled lady who haunts the seminary, because it is supposed she comes back to try to wreak vengeance on the people who wronged her. Allison, you tell little Elise that story to-night, and let her spread it among the primary grades, and it'll be all over the school by the time the girls are ready to perform, that the Wraith of Vengeance has been seen again, floating near Mittie Dupong's door."

There was no regular meeting of the Shadow Club that Saturday. Mrs. Walton had not been taken into the secret of the Wraiths of Vengeance, and when it was explained to her that Betty had a cold and could not come, and Lloyd and Ida had had a misunderstanding and were not on good terms, she was quite willing to compensate the girls for their disappointment by inviting Lucy Smith and Retta Long to tea.

Some of the neighbours came in to spend the evening, so Allison and Kitty took their guests up-stairs to make some experiments with a magic lantern which had often afforded them amusement. Little Elise, who had seen all the pictures many times before, went back to the library, and Barbry

soon finished her evening duties up-stairs; so no one ever knew just what those experiments were.

Among the slides was a picture of Lot's wife; a tall, white figure with a half-lifted veil, turning for a backward look. The lurid flames of burning Sodom glowed in the background the first time Lucy and Retta saw it thrown upon the wall, but the last time it was changed into a ghostly figure that made those Wraiths of Vengeance dance for joy. Allison, with a thick coat of black paint, had carefully covered all the background, blotting out everything in the circle except the figure itself, which stood out with startling distinctness. Then from the top of a step-ladder they practised throwing it from the transom of Allison's room through the opposite transom of the room across the hall.

"It will be even easier than this at the seminary," said Lucy, "for the hall between Mittie's room and mine is narrower, and the transoms are lower. That will throw the figure directly above the foot of Mittie's bed. I think it will be all the better that we have to throw it high, for it will give the floating effect the veiled lady is famous for, to have the head so near the ceiling. I'll have to lay in a stock of provisions so that I need not go down to supper Monday night. Then while everybody

is in the dining-room I'll hide the step-ladder under my bed, and experiment with the lantern from my transom to get exactly the right position."

"What if Mittie shouldn't wake up when you flash it in?" suggested Allison.

Retta was equal to providing for such an emergency. "I'll set my watch with Lucy's," she said, "and at exactly the moment we agree upon, I'll tap on Mittie's window just below mine with a bottle let down on a string. I'll give three sepulchral knocks, then wait a minute and give three more. I should think that an empty bottle knocking against the glass would give a hollow sort of sound. That's the window we always keep open at night."

"When it's time for Barbry to take you home," said Allison, "we'll go, too, and help carry the lantern. Now this is a case of our shadow-selves being where we can not. We can't do the actual scaring, but it's our lantern that's going to cast the shadow that will make Mittie Dupong afraid to listen again as long as she lives."

It took considerable self-denial on Lucy's part to forego supper when the time came to carry out the plan, but the spirit of mischief was stronger than her appetite. She was rewarded by finding the daintiest of luncheons in the box Allison left upon

her table, and as she sat down to enjoy it after bringing in the step-ladder from the chambermaid's supply-closet and making her experiments, she thought the Order of Wraiths was a most excellent thing to which to belong.

Although midnight is the prescribed time for all ghostly visitants, these wraiths had arranged for a much earlier appearing. It would cost too great an effort to keep awake until that witching hour. It was not more than half-past ten, although the seminary had been in darkness and silence for an hour, when Retta leaned out of her window, dangling an empty shoe-polish bottle on the end of a long string. It swung against Mittie's window just below with three hollow knocks. Ten seconds after by Lucy's watch the knocking was repeated. She could not hear it from her room, but her faith in Retta's punctuality in carrying out her part of the programme made her send a dazzling circle of light from the lantern she was manipulating, to rest on the wall above the foot of Mittie's bed.

Mittie sat up in bed, too startled to utter a sound. The light instantly disappeared and a white-veiled figure took its place. To her horror she could distinctly see the dark wall-paper through its

ghostly outlines. She buried her face in the bedclothes with a moan of terror.

"What's the matter, Mittie?" asked her roommate, from the opposite bed, who had been aroused by the knocking and the light, but had not opened her eyes until she heard the moan. The sound of a human voice gave Mittie courage to look out again. The apparition was gone.

"Oh," she quavered, "I must have been dreaming. I thought there was a knocking at the window, then there was a blinding light, and the next instant the veiled lady seemed to float across the room at the foot of my bed. I never was so frightened in my life. My tongue is stiff yet, and I am all in a shiver. Oh, it was awful!"

"It must have been the potato salad you ate for supper," answered Sara, drowsily; but as she spoke the three slow knocks sounded again at the window, and she raised herself on her elbow to listen.

"Oo-oo-oh! There it is again!" wailed Mittie, burrowing under the bedclothes again. The hair fairly rose on Sara's head as the outlines of a veiled figure appeared above the foot of Mittie's bed, floating hesitatingly a little space, and then vanished. In a flash Sara had disappeared from view also, and lay almost smothered under the

blankets, so rigid with fear that she dared not move a muscle. She held herself motionless until she began to ache. It seemed hours before either one dared look out again, although it was barely five minutes.

"It was the hoodoo beginning to work," gasped Sara, in a hoarse whisper. "Oh, if I ever live through this night I tell you I'll get out of this room in the morning, Mittie Dupong. I'll never spend another night with a girl that's marked for the haunts to follow."

It was hours before they fell asleep, for they kept opening their eyes to assure themselves that the apparition had not reappeared. Even in broad daylight the memory of their fright was not a pleasant thing to think about. It required all the persuasion that Mittie could bring to bear, and the gift of a coral fan-chain to prevail upon Sara not to go to the teachers with the matter. She finally consented to room with Mittie one more night, but announced in case the ghost came back she'd certainly alarm the seminary.

"But if the teachers found out that I really was marked that way," sobbed Mittie, "they'd go to investigating, and find out about my eavesdrop-

ping, and they wouldn't let me stay in the school, if the spirits made such a disturbance about it."

Sara promised secrecy, but while no hint of the appearance reached the faculty, every girl in the seminary heard of it before night. Nothing was talked of but table-tippings and spirit-rapping and "appearances." No ghostly visitant disturbed Mittie's and Sara's slumbers the second night. The Shadow Club, in secret session, decided it would not be safe to venture again so soon. But a spirit of unrest seemed to pervade the whole seminary. Mischievous girls knocked on the walls to see their roommates turn pale. Cold hands reached suddenly out of dark corners to clutch unwary passers-by, and a panic spread in a single evening among the pupils, more contagious than mumps or measles. Every one not infected with the fear seemed infected with a desire to make some one else afraid.

Even gentle little Jean Wilson, whose deportment was always perfect, and who was too tender-hearted to watch a spider killed, so the girls declared, felt moved to do something. Her roommate, Ada Day, loudly proclaimed that *she* was not afraid of spooks, and she didn't have any patience with girls who were silly enough to believe such tales. Nothing could frighten *her!*

While Ada was in the bath-room that evening, Jean emptied a tin box of talcum powder, slipped a spool of thread inside, and drawing the end of the thread through one of the holes in the perforated lid, hid the box in the springs of Ada's bed. The black thread trailing across the carpet to Jean's pillow was not visible in the dimly lighted room when Ada came back and found Jean lying with her eyes closed. She did not turn up the lamp, but began undressing as quietly as possible, and was soon in bed herself. Both girls were wakeful that night. Both heard the clock strike several times. Ada tossed and turned whenever she roused, but Jean lay as quiet as possible, breathing regularly, so that Ada thought she was asleep and did not venture to speak.

As the clock in the lower hall stopped striking twelve, Jean reached for the thread fastened to her pillow by a pin, and gave it several quick uneven jerks. The spool rattling in the tin box sounded like the mysterious rappings at which Ada had turned up her nose. To hear it thus in the dead of night was a different matter to Ada.

"Jean!" she called, in a hoarse stage-whisper. "Jean! Did you hear that? What do you suppose it is?"

Jean gave the thread another tweak, and then answered, in the same loud whisper, "It sounds to me as if something was trying to spell your name by tapping. It comes from under your bed, but then of course you don't believe in such things. It may be a warning."

"I wish I dared put my foot out of bed," said Ada, her teeth chattering. "I'd get up and make a light. You do it, Jean. I'd do that much for you if the noise was under your bed."

"Sh!" warned Jean. "I believe something is really calling you. It's certainly spelling your name. Now count. One knock — that is A. One, two, three, four — D. One again — A. Yes, that spelled Ada. Now it's beginning again. One, two, three, four — D. One — A." The knocks followed in rapid succession until Ada, realizing that they were going all the way to Y, was almost paralyzed with terror.

"Oh, Jean!" she wailed. "Stop it! Stop it! Get up and make a light, or call the matron, or something! I can't stand it a minute longer! I'll be a gibbering idiot if you don't stop that awful knocking!"

Jean still continued to jerk the thread, till she heard Ada spring up desperately as if to jump out

of bed. Then she said, "Oh, do be still, Ada Day. It's nothing but a spool in a tin box. See! I'll strike a match and show you. I was only playing a trick on you because you boasted nothing could frighten you. Don't rouse the house, for mercy's sake."

It took much time and much pleading on Jean's part to convince Ada that there was really no spirit under her bed, and then it took more time and pleading to appease her anger. The sound of voices and the striking of a match aroused the matron. She lay for a moment, wondering what was the matter; then, thinking that some one might be ill and in need of her services, she got up, slipped on a warm bathrobe and her felt bedroom slippers, and stepped out into the hall to investigate.

All was quiet, but she had a feeling that some mischief was afloat. An inkling of the disturbing element in the school had reached her early in the day, and although she had said nothing to the teachers, she had made a careful round of inspection just before going to bed. Some rumour of the doings of the Shadow Club which had come to her made her go to the west wing and push aside the portière hanging over the door that led to the outside stairway. The bolt was in place,

but it slipped easily in its sheath as if it had lately been oiled. Selecting a key on the ring at her belt, she locked the door. "I'll risk a fire for one night," she thought, "but I can't risk some other things."

Although the hall was quiet when she stepped out now in the midnight silence, some feeling that all was not right made her slip on down the front stairs. There was no light, excepting a faint starlight, that served to show where the windows were. As she stood there listening, about to strike a match, something in white brushed down the stairs past her. Half in a spirit of mischief, thinking to pay the girl or ghost, whichever it was, back in her own coin, the matron threw her arms around the sheeted figure.

There was a muffled scream of terror. But, holding her captive fast with one strong hand, the matron struck a match with the other.

"Hush!" she said. "There's no use in disturbing everybody." Then as the match flared up she saw that it was no Wraith of Vengeance she held. The sheet fell to the floor, revealing Ida Shane, dressed even to hat and furs, and carrying her leather travelling-bag.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHADOW CLUB IN DISGRACE

"THE president wishes to see the members of the Shadow Club in his office immediately. They will please pass out before we proceed with the opening exercises."

That was the announcement Professor Fowler made in chapel next morning, and a clap of thunder from a clear sky could not have been more unexpected or more startling in its effect. A frightened silence pervaded the room so deep that every girl could hear her heart beat. A message to Doctor Wells's office at that hour was almost unheard of. He always conducted the chapel exercises himself. It must be a matter of grave importance indeed that would cause his absence now, and the sending of such a message.

Lloyd and Betty exchanged startled glances, then slowly rose, followed by Allison and Kitty. Katie stood up next and looked back with a giggle at Lucy, Retta, Rose and Dora, who, being only of the Order

of W. V.'s, hesitated to follow. But emphatic beckonings brought them to their feet, and they filed out into the hall after the other girls, their heads held high, and smiling as if indifferent to the whisperings around them.

But the instant the door closed upon them and they found themselves alone in the hall outside, they began demanding of each other the reason for the summons.

"You needn't ask *me!*" exclaimed Lucy. "We didn't do a thing last night on our side of the building. I've no more idea than a chipmunk why we were sent for."

"Nothing happened in our wing," protested Betty and Lloyd, in the same breath.

"Oh, girls, I'm all in a shake!" exclaimed Retta Long, almost in tears. "It frightens me nearly to death to think of being called up before the president. Such a thing never happened to me before, nor to any of our family."

"Oh, boo!" exclaimed Kitty, with a reassuring smile. "We haven't done anything so killing bad that we need care. We've only had a little fun. Come on! I'm not afraid of all the king's horses and all the king's men."

But in spite of her brave words she sat down

as shyly as the rest of them when Doctor Wells, tall and commanding, motioned them to seats in front of his desk. He looked so big and dignified, standing before them erect and silent, while he waited for them to be seated, that her courage failed her. But when he sat down in his armchair and looked gravely from one frightened face to the other, Kitty saw a twinkle in the kind eyes behind the spectacles which reassured her.

"We caught a ghost in the seminary last night, young ladies," he began, abruptly, with a smile twitching an instant at the corners of his mouth. It was only for an instant. His face was unusually grave as he proceeded. "It was just in time to prevent a very serious occurrence which would have been a great calamity to the school. It made a partial confession which implicated some one in your club, and I have sent for you in order that you may clear yourselves at once. Most of your mischief has been only innocent amusement, I know, but I must have a complete history of the club, from the beginning six weeks ago, up till twelve o'clock last night."

At mention of a ghost, they looked at each other with startled faces, wondering how much he already knew. Evidently some one outside of the club

had been playing their own game, and they wondered who could have made a confession which could truthfully have included them. Instinctively they turned to Betty to be their spokesman. With her truthful brown eyes looking straight into the doctor's, Betty clasped her hands in her lap and gave a simple account of the club.

She began with the verse Miss Edith had written in their albums, and the story she had told them of the girls who walked forty miles to the mountain school. She told of the impulse it had awakened in them to do something for the mountain people, and the club that had grown out of that desire.

"We didn't intend to play any pranks in the beginning," she said; "all we wanted to do was to cast our shadow-selves where we could never be. But just after Hallowe'en we met in our room one Saturday afternoon, and a girl hid in the closet next to ours and heard all our secrets and went and told them, and we decided to shadow *her* awhile, to punish her for being so mean. But one-half of the club lived outside the seminary, and Ida Shane resigned about that time, so we established a new order, and took these four girls in as Wraiths of Vengeance." She nodded toward the new members.

A grim smile flitted across the doctor's face as he listened to her explanation of their duties, and heard the use they had made of Lot's wife and the magic lantern. But he smoothed his white moustache to cover his amusement, and when she finished he sat in deep thought a moment, his brows drawn closely together.

"If there was any ghost around last night, we weren't responsible for its doings," she added. "It didn't belong to the club."

"Why did Ida Shane resign?" he asked, suddenly.

"I don't know, sir," answered Betty. "She wouldn't tell."

"There must have been a reason," he continued, sternly. "Do you know, Kitty?"

"No, sir."

"Do you, Katie?"

"No, sir."

The same question and the same answer passed down the line until it came to Lloyd. She blushed a vivid scarlet and hesitated.

"Yes, I know," she exclaimed. "But I am not at liberty to tell."

The president held out part of a torn envelope, on which was written with many flourishes in a

bold, masculine hand, "Lloydsboro Seminary. Kindness of bearer."

"Have any of you seen this handwriting before?" he asked.

The envelope was passed from hand to hand, each girl shaking her head in denial, until it came to Lloyd. With a sick sinking of heart she recognized the familiar penmanship that had been such a bugbear, and which she had hoped never to see again. All the colour faded from her face as she faintly acknowledged that it was familiar.

"That is all," he said, carelessly tossing the paper back on the desk. "I am glad to find that the club, as a club, is in no way accountable for the affair that I mentioned. I shall have to forbid any more games of ghost, however, and must ask the owners of the magic lantern to take their property home."

He kept them a moment longer, with a few earnest words which they never could forget, they were so fatherly, so helpful, and inspiring. They went away with a higher value of the motive of their little club and its power to influence others; and an earnest purpose to measure up to the high standard he set for them, made them quiet and thoughtful all that morning.

"Just a moment, please, Lloyd," he said, as she was about to pass out with the others. "There's another matter about which I wish to speak to you."

She dropped into her seat again. When the last girl had passed out, closing the door behind her, he picked up the scrap of envelope again, saying, "I must ask you one more question, Lloyd. *Where* have you seen this handwriting before?"

She looked up at him imploringly. "Oh, please, Doctah Wells," she begged, "don't ask me! I'm not at liberty to tell that, eithah. I promised that I wouldn't, on my honah, you know."

"But it is imperative that I should know," he answered, sternly. "You are here in my charge, and I have the right to demand an answer."

"I am in honah bound not to tell," she repeated, a trifle defiantly, although her lips quivered. "It would get some one else into trouble, and I have to refuse, even if you expel me for it."

The doctor and the old Colonel had been friends since their youth, and he recognized the "Lloyd stubbornness" now in the firmly set mouth and the poise of the head.

"My dear child," he said, kindly, seeing a tear begin to steal from under her long lashes. "It

is for your own sake, in the absence of your parents, and for the sake of the school's reputation, that I am obliged to make these inquiries. The somebody whom you are trying to shield is already in trouble, and your telling or not telling can make no difference now."

Lloyd looked up in alarm.

"Yes, it was Ida Shane whom the matron discovered trying to steal out of the seminary last night. Ned Bannon was waiting outside to take her on the fast express to Cincinnati. They were to have been married there this morning at his cousin's had they not been interrupted in their plans."

Lloyd gave a gasp, and the tree outside the window seemed to be going round and round.

"We have telegraphed for her aunt. She will be here this afternoon to take her home, and the affair will be ended as far as the seminary is concerned. Now what I must know, is just what connection have you had with it. Ida confessed that a member of the Shadow Club had helped her carry on a clandestine correspondence for awhile, but for some reason suddenly refused to be the bearer of their letters any longer. It was for that reason, she said, feeling that her only friend had failed

her, that she consented to the elopement, which happily has been prevented."

"Oh, Doctah Wells! Do *you* think I am to blame for it?" cried Lloyd, wishing that the ground would open and swallow her if he should say yes.

"It was so hard to know what to do! It neahly broke my heart to refuse her, but — it was this way."

With the tears running down her face she poured out the whole story, from the beginning of her devotion to Ida, to the day when, under her grandmother's portrait she fought the battle between her love for her friend and loyalty to the family honour.

"There wasn't anybody to tell me," she sobbed at the last. "And if I was wrong and am to blame for Ida's running away, nobody will evah trust me again!"

A very tender smile flashed across the doctor's stern face and the eyes gleamed through the spectacles with a kinder light than she had ever seen in them, as he leaned forward to say:

"I have known George Lloyd many, many years, my child, and I want to say that he has never had more reason to be proud of anything in his life than that his little granddaughter, under such a test, recognized the right and stood true to the traditions

of an old and honourable family when it cost her a friendship that she held very dear. Just now Ida feels that she has been cruelly used, and that her happiness is wrecked for life; but in time she will see differently. Poor mistaken child! I talked with her this morning. Ned is only a selfish, overgrown boy, with many bad habits, and like many another of his kind knows that the plea that she is reforming him is the strongest argument he can use in influencing her. He tells her she is doing that, but to my certain knowledge he has not given up a single vice since he has known her. She thinks that it is her duty to cling to him. I admire her devotion in one way, but it makes her blind to every other duty. She is too infatuated to be able to judge between the right and wrong, and at present feels bitter toward the whole world.

"But by and by, when she grows wiser and learns that the judgment of a sixteen-year-old girl in such matters cannot safely be trusted, she will be glad that you helped bring the affair to a crisis. When she has outgrown her infatuation she will see that you have done her a kindness instead of a wrong, and she will thank you deeply."

Lloyd had not felt so light-hearted for days, as when she left the president's office, both on her

own account and Ida's. When she went into the class-room it was with such a bright face that every one felt the message to the Shadow Club must have been some mark of especial honour.

When Doctor Wells thought the affair ended as far as the seminary was concerned, he had not taken the newspapers into account.

No one could guess where they got their information. Friday morning a Louisville paper came out to the Valley with startling headlines: "*Pretty Schoolgirl at Lloydsboro Valley Attempts to Elope with Son of Prominent Judge! Granddaughter of Well-Known Kentucky Colonel Plays Important Part! Shadow Club in Disgrace! Ghosts and Lovers vs. Good Behaviour and Learning!*"

No names were mentioned, but the badly garbled account made a buzz of wonder and criticism in the Valley. Doctor Wells came into chapel looking worried and haggard. He simply stated the facts of the case and held up the paper with the false account, speaking of the effect such a report would have on the school.

"It puts us in a bad light," he said. "The public will say we should have been more watchful. This will be copied all over the State before the week

is out. One girl has already been ordered home by telegraph on account of it."

Lloyd did not see the paper until noon. She read it hastily, standing in the hall, and then ran up to her room to throw herself across her bed in a violent spell of crying.

"Oh, how could they tell such dreadful stories!" she sobbed to Betty. "They might as well have published my name in big red lettahs as to have described Locust and grandfathah so plainly that every one will know who is meant. He and mothah will be so mawtified! I nevah want to look anybody in the face again, aftah having such lies copied all ovah the State about me, as Doctah Wells says they will be. I can't follow them up and prove to everybody that they are not true, and it's such an awful disgrace to be talked about that way in the papahs. If grandfathah or Papa Jack were home I believe they'd shoot that horrid editah!"

The matron came in and tried to comfort her, but she would not listen. She was in a nervous state when trifles were magnified into great troubles, and she persisted in thinking that she was too disgraced by the false report to ever appear in public again. Betty could not coax her down to dinner, and it

was not long before she had cried herself into a throbbing headache.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, exhausted by her crying, she fell into such a sound sleep that she did not hear the girls go tramping out for their daily walk. Betty stole in and looked at her and went sorrowfully out again. Magnolia Budine, passing the door with her carpet-bag on the way to the old carryall waiting at the gate, stopped a moment and listened. It was an exciting tale she was carrying home to Roney this Friday afternoon. She was glad the sobs had ceased. She had heard them at noon, and had gone around with the cloud of Lloyd's trouble resting on her like a heavy burden.

It was nearly dark when Lloyd awoke. Some one was tapping at the door. Before she could find her voice to say Come in, Mrs. Walton was standing beside her. It was as if a burst of sunshine had suddenly brightened the dull November twilight. Lloyd started to scramble up, but Mrs. Walton insisted on her lying still. Sitting down on the side of the bed, she began stroking her hot forehead with soft, motherly touches.

"I had a conversation with Doctor Wells over the telephone about that affair in the paper," she

began. "He told me what a state you were in about it, so I immediately wrote to your mother a full explanation and sent it off on the two o'clock train, stamped 'special delivery.' She'll get it as soon as the paper, so put your mind at rest on that point. Now I've come over to tell you something I found out about you the other day. You don't even know it yourself. You'll be surprised and glad, I'm sure. It's quite a story, so I shall have to begin it like one.

"One blustery day last week an old farmer stopped at Clovercroft and asked to see Miss Katherine. It proved to be Magnolia Budine's father. He had been there once before with a crock of apple-butter, which he brought as a sort of thank-offering to Katherine because she had made Magnolia so happy about the costume and the picture she took of her in it.

"Katherine said he would have made a striking picture himself as he stood there with his slouched hat pulled over his ears, a blue woollen muffler wound around his neck, and an enormous bronze turkey gobbler in his arms. He wouldn't go in at first, but finally stepped inside out of the wind, still holding the turkey in his arms.

"It seems that there is a man living on his

place who used to be an old neighbour of the Budines when they lived near Loretta. This man has been unable to work for some time, and is occupying the cabin free of rent. He has a daughter about sixteen who is very ill. She is Magnolia's best friend, and the child was afraid that Roney, as he called her, was going to die. She wanted her picture above all things, and anything that Magnolia wants the old fellow evidently makes an effort to get for her. He seems completely wrapped up in her. So there he stood with his best bronze gobbler in his arms and tears in his eyes, wanting to know of Katherine if it would be a sufficient inducement for her to drive over with him and take the sick girl's picture.

"She told him she never took pictures for pay, and said she would be glad to do it for nothing if it were not such a bleak day that she was afraid to ride so far in the cold. He was greatly distressed at his failure to persuade her to go, for he was afraid that Roney might die before the weather changed, and then his little girl would be so grieved that she would never get over it. Katherine was so touched by the old fellow's disappointment that she relented, and told him she would risk the

cold if I would be willing to go with her. They came by for me, and I went.

"Oh, Lloyd, I wish you could have seen that poor, bare room where Roney was lying. It was clean, but so pitifully bare of all that is bright and comfortable. I looked around and saw not a picture except an unframed chromo tacked over the mantel, till my eyes happened to rest on the old wooden clock. There behind its glass door, swinging back and forth on the pendulum, was *your* picture; the Princess with the dove."

Lloyd raised herself on one elbow. "*My* pictuah!" she cried, in astonishment. "How did it get there?"

"That is what I couldn't help asking Roney. I wish you could have seen her face light up as she looked at it. 'That's my Princess, Mrs. Walton,' she said. 'Magnolia gave it to me. You don't know how she has helped me through the long days and nights. Of course I can't see her in the dark, but every time the clock ticks I know she is swinging away there, saying, "For love — will find — a way."'

"I found that Roney's case is one for the King's Daughters to take in hand. She has a small annuity left her by her mother's family; that is all her

father and she have to live on. That will stop at her death, and it is her one anxiety that in spite of all her pain she may hang on to life in order that her father may be provided for. The King's Daughters sent for a specialist to come out and examine her. He says she can be cured, so next week we are to move her into Louisville to a hospital for treatment.

"You never saw such a happy face as hers when we told her. 'Oh,' she cried, 'I almost gave up last week. The pain was so terrible. I couldn't have borne it if I hadn't watched the pendulum and, every time it ticked, said, "I'll stand it one more second for daddy's sake, and one more, and one more; I'm spinning the golden thread like the Princess, and love *will* find a way to help me hang on a little longer!"'

"So you see, dear," said Mrs. Walton, with a playful pat of the cheek, "your face and Betty's song brought hope and strength to a poor suffering little soul of whom you never heard. Your shadow-self reached a long, long way when it brought comfort to Roney and helped keep her brave. What do you care for this trifle you are crying about? The whole affair will blow over and be forgotten in a short time. Get up and go to counting the

pendulum with Roney, and sing like the real princess you are. '*Love* will find a way' to make us forget the unpleasant things and remember only the good."

Lloyd sat up and threw both her arms around Mrs. Walton's neck. "You're the real princess," she said, softly, with a kiss. "For you go about doing good all the time, like a real king's daughtah."

"Now run along, little girl," said Mrs. Walton, gaily, as Lloyd slipped off the bed. "Bathe your eyes and pack your satchel. I am going to take you and Betty home with me to stay until Monday morning."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE THREE WEAVERS

No better cure could have been found for Lloyd's dejection than her visit to The Beeches. It was impossible for her to brood over her troubles while Allison and Kitty were continually saying funny things, and rushing her from one interesting game to another. After a good night's sleep the events of the previous day seemed so far away that what she had considered such a disgrace had somehow lost its sting, and she wondered how she could have suffered so keenly over it.

Katie Mallard came over soon after breakfast, and they spent nearly the entire day outdoors. The air was frosty and bracing, and when Mrs. Walton saw them come running into the house just before sundown with bright eyes and red cheeks, she felt well pleased with the success of her plan.

She was sitting in her room by a front window writing letters when the girls came rushing up

the stairs into the adjoining room. Kitty carried a basket of apples, and Allison some pop-corn and the popper, and presently an appetizing odour began to steal in as the white grains danced over the open fire.

As the girls hovered hungrily around, waiting for the popping to cease, they began a lively discussion which caught Mrs. Walton's attention. She paused, pen in hand, at the mention of two names, Daisy Dale and the Heiress of Dorn. They were familiar names, for only the day before Miss Edith had showed her the pile of books found in Ida's closet, and she was waiting for a suitable time to speak of them to the girls. As she folded her letter and addressed it, she decided she would call them in a little later, when they were through with their apples and their corn, for a quiet little twilight talk. A golden afterglow gleamed above the western tree-tops, and, leaning back in her rocking-chair, she sat watching it fade out, so absorbed in a story she was thinking to tell them that she ceased to hear the girlish chatter in the next room till Lloyd's voice rang out clearly:

"I've made up my mind. I'm *nevah* going to get married!"

"Then you'll be an old maid," was Kitty's teas-

ing rejoinder, "and people will poke fun at you and your cats and teacups."

"I'll not have any," was the prompt reply. "I nevah expect to have any moah pets of any kind. Whenevah I get to loving anything, something always happens to it. Think of all the pets we have had at Locust. Fritz, and the two Bobs, and Boots, and the gobblah, and the goat, and the parrot, and deah old Hero! Something happened to every one of them. The ponies are the only things left, and the only kind of a pet I'd evah have again. If Tarbaby should die, I'd buy me a hawse, for I don't expect to be the kind of an old maid that sits in a chimney-cawnah with a tabby and a teapot. I expect to dash around the country on hawseback and have fun even when I'm old and wrinkled and gray. I'll go to college, of co'se, and I'll have interesting people to visit me, so that I'll keep up my interest in the world and not get cranky."

"I'll come and live with you," said Allison. "I'll have a studio and devote my life to making a great artist of myself. We could buy Tanglewood, and make a moat all around the house so that we could pull up the drawbridge when we wanted to be alone or were afraid of burglars."

"Maybe it would be better for me to be an old

maid, too," said Betty, musingly. "I'd have more time to write books than if I had a husband and a family to look after. And, besides, while I like to read about lovers and such things in stories, it would make me feel dreadfully foolish to have any man fall on his knees to me and say the things that Lord Rokeby and Guy said to Daisy Dale. I don't even like to write those speeches when I'm in a room by myself. I've tried lots of times, and I've about decided to skip that part in my story. I'll put some stars instead, and begin, 'A year has passed, and Gladys and Eugene,' etc."

"I was going to ask mothah how Papa Jack did it," said Lloyd, "but aftah all that's happened, somehow I'd rathah not say anything about such things to oldah people. Miss McCannister was so horrified when she found we had talked such 'sentimental foolishness,' as she called it. I'll nevah forget the way she screwed up her lips and said, 'It wasn't considahed propah, when I was a child, for little girls to discuss such subjects.' I felt as if I had been caught doing something wicked. It mawtified me dreadfully, and I made up my mind that I'd nevah get to be fond of anybody the way Ida was, for fear I might be mistaken in them as she was."

"Everything seems to be a warning lately," said Betty. "Even the literature lessons this week. If the *Lady of Shalott* hadn't left her weaving to look out of the window when Sir Lancelot rode by, the curse wouldn't have come upon her."

"There!" cried Allison, scrambling to her feet. "That reminds me that I haven't learned the verses that Miss Edith asked us to memorize for Monday."

She took a worn copy of Tennyson from the table, and began rapidly turning the leaves.

"I learned the whole thing yesterday," said Betty. "I can say every word of part first."

"It's easy," remarked Kitty. "I know part of it, although I'm not in the class. I learned it from hearing Allison read it:

> "'Four gray walls and four gray towers
> Overlook a space of flowers.
> And the silent isle embowers
> The Lady of Shalott.'

Isn't that right?"

"Yes, but that isn't Monday's lesson. It's part second we have to learn."

"Let's all learn it," proposed Katie. "It's so pretty and jingles along so easily I'd like to know

it, too. You line it out, Allison, as Frazer does the hymns at the coloured baptizings, and we'll run a race and see who can repeat it first."

"There she weaves by night and day," read Allison, and then the five voices gabbled it all together, "There she weaves by night and day."

The concert recitation went on for some time, and presently the lines of the familiar old poem began weaving themselves into the story Mrs. Walton was thinking about. The red gold of the afterglow had not entirely faded from the sky when she left her seat by the window and went into the next room. The five girls on the hearth-rug were still chanting the lesson over and over.

"Come hear us say it, mother," called Kitty, drawing up a chair for her. "Betty learned it first."

Allison deposited the bowl of pop-corn in her lap and passed her the basket of apples, and then flourished the popper like a drum-major's baton. "Now all together!" she cried, and the five voices rang out like one:

"There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,

And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she.
The Lady of Shalott.

"And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near,
Winding down to Camelot.
There the river eddy whirls,
And the surly village churls
And the red cloaks of market-girls
Pass onward from Shalott.

"Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd lad
Or long-haired page in crimson clad
Goes by to Camelot.
And sometimes through the mirror blue
The knights come riding two by two.
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott."

"Why, she was an old maid! Wasn't she!" said Katie, so plaintively as they finished that they all laughed.

"That's what Allison and Betty and Lloyd are going to be, mother," said Kitty, teasingly. Lloyd, with a very red face, hastened to change the subject. She snuggled up against Mrs. Walton's knee, saying, as she looked into the glowing fire, "This is the

best time of the day, when the wind goes 'Whooo' in the chimney, and it's cold and dark outdoahs and cheerful and bright inside. It's just the time for story-telling. Don't you know one, Mrs. Walton?"

"Of course she does," Kitty answered for her. "And if you don't know one, you can make one up to order. Can't you, mamsie?"

"Your poem suggested a story," answered Mrs. Walton, and with one hand smoothing Lloyd's fair head as it rested against her knee, and the other stroking Kitty's dark one in her lap, she began:

"Once upon a time (the same time that the Lady of Shalott wove her magic web, and near the four gray towers from which she watched the road running down to Camelot), there lived three weavers. Their houses stood side by side, and such had been their equal fortunes that whatever happened under the roof of one had always happened under the roofs of the others. They wove the same patterns in their looms, and they received the same number of shillings for their webs. They sang the same songs, told the same tales, ate the same kind of broth from the same kind of bowls, and dressed in the same coarse goods of hodden gray.

"But they were unlike as three weavers could possibly be. The first insisted on weaving all his

webs a certain length, regardless of the size of the man who must wear the mantle. (Each web was supposed to be just long enough to make one mantle.) The second carelessly wove his any length that happened to be convenient, and stretched or cut it afterward to fit whomsoever would take it. But the third, with great painstaking and care, measured first the man and then the web by the inches and ells of his carefully notched yardstick.

"Now to each weaver was born a daughter, all on the same day, and they named them Hertha, Huberta, and Hildegarde. On the night after the christening, as the three men sat smoking their pipes on the same stoop, the father of Hertha said, 'Do not think me puffed up with unseemly pride, good neighbours, but wonderful fortune hath befallen me and mine this day. Clotho, the good fairy of all the weavers, was present at my Hertha's christening, and left beside her cradle a gift: a tiny loom that from beam to shuttle is of purest gold. And she whispered to me in passing, "Good fortune, Herthold. It is written in the stars that a royal prince shall seek to wed thy child."'

"But Herthold's news caused no astonishment to his neighbours. What had happened under the roof of one had happened under the roofs of all,

and the same good fortune was written in the stars for each, and the same gift had been left by each child's cradle. So the three friends rejoiced together, and boasted jestingly among themselves of the three kings' sons who should some day sit down at their tables.

"But presently Hildgardmar, the father of Hildegarde, said, 'But there may be a slip twixt cup and lip. Mayhap our daughters cannot fulfil the required condition.'

"At that they looked grave for a moment, for Clotho had added in passing, 'One thing is necessary. She must weave upon this loom I leave a royal mantle for the prince's wearing. It must be ample and fair to look upon, rich cloth of gold, of princely size and texture. Many will come to claim it, but if it is woven rightly the destined prince alone can wear it, and him it will fit in all faultlessness, as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon. But if it should not be ample and fine, meet for royal wearing, the prince will not deign to don it, and the maiden's heart shall break, as broke the shattered mirror of the Lady of Shalott.'

"'Oh, well,' said Herthold, when the three had smoked in silence a little space. 'I'll guard against that. I shall hide all knowledge of the magic loom

from my daughter until she be grown. Then, under mine own eye, by mine own measurements that I always use, shall she weave the goodly garment. In the meantime she shall learn all the arts which become a princess to know — broidery and fair needlework, and songs upon a lute. But of the weaving she shall know naught until she be grown. That I am determined upon. 'Tis sorry work her childish hands would make of it, if left to throw the shuttle at a maiden's fickle fancy.'

"But Hubert shook his head. 'Why stew about a trifle!' he exclaimed. 'Forsooth, on such a tiny loom no web of any kind can well be woven. 'Tis but a toy that Clotho left the child to play with, and she shall weave her dreams and fancies on it at her own sweet will. I shall not interfere. What's written in the stars is written, and naught that I can do will change it. Away, friend Hildgardmar, with thy forebodings!'

"Hildgardmar said nothing in reply, but he thought much. He followed the example of the others, and early and late might have been heard the pounding of the three looms, for there was need to work harder than ever now, that the little maidens might have teachers for all the arts becoming a

princess — broidery and fair needlework and songs upon the lute.

"While the looms pounded in the dwellings the little maidens grew apace. They played together in the same garden and learned from the same skilled teachers their daily lessons, and in their fondness for each other were as three sisters.

"One day Huberta said to the others, 'Come with me and I will show you a beautiful toy that Clotho left me at my christening. My father says she gave one to each of us, and that it is written in the stars that we are each to wed a prince if we can weave for him an ample cloak of cloth of gold. Already I have begun to weave mine."

"All silently, for fear of watchful eyes and forbidding voices, they stole into an inner room, and she showed them the loom of gold. But now no longer was it the tiny toy that had been left beside her cradle. It had grown with her growth. For every inch that had been added to her stature an inch had been added to the loom's. The warp was Clotho's gift, all thread of gold, and it, too, grew with the maiden's growth; but the thread the shuttle carried was of her own spinning — rainbow hued and rose-coloured, from the airy dream-fleece of her own sweet fancies.

"'See,' she whispered, 'I have begun the mantle for my prince's wearing.' Seizing the shuttle as she had seen her father do so many times, she crossed the golden warp with the woof-thread of a rosy day-dream. Hertha and Hildegarde looked on in silent envy, not so much for the loom as for the mirror which hung beside it, wherein, as in the Lady of Shalott's, moved the shadows of the world. The same pictures that flitted across hers, flitted across Huberta's.

"'See!' she cried again, pointing to the mirror, 'That curly shepherd lad! Does he not look like a prince as he strides by with his head high, and his blue eyes smiling upon all the world? He carries his crook like a royal sceptre, forsooth. Well you may believe I am always at my mirror both at sunrise and sunset to see him pass gaily by.'

"'Yon long-haired page in crimson clad is more to my liking,' said Hertha, timidly. 'Methinks he has a noble mien, as of one brought up in palaces. I wonder why my father has never said aught to me of Clotho's gift. I, too, should be at my weaving, for I am as old as thou, Huberta.'

"'And I also,' added Hildegarde.

"'Ask him,' quoth Huberta. 'Mayhap he hath forgot.'

"So when Hertha reached home, she went to her father Herthold, and said, timidly, with downcast eyes and blushes, 'Father — where is my loom, like Huberta's? I, too, would be weaving as it is written in the stars.'

"But Herthold glowered upon her grimly. 'Who told thee of aught that is written in the stars?' he demanded, so sternly that her heart quaked within her. 'Hear me! Never again must thou listen to such idle tales. When thou art a woman grown, thou mayst come to me, and I may talk to thee then of webs and weaving, but what hast thou to do with such things now? Thou! a silly child! Bah! I am ashamed that ever a daughter of mine should think such foolishness!'

"Hertha, shamed and abashed, stole away to weep, that she had incurred her father's scorn. But next day, when they played in the garden, Huberta said, 'Thy father is an old tyrant to forbid thee the use of Clotho's gift. He cannot love thee as mine does me, or he would not deny thee such a pleasure. Come! I will help thee to find it.'

"So hand in hand they stole into an inner room by a door that Herthold thought securely bolted, and there stood a loom like Huberta's, and over it a mirror in which the same shadows of the world were

repeated in passing. And as Hertha picked up the shuttle to send the thread of a rosy day-dream through the warp of gold, the long-haired page in crimson clad passed down the street outside, and she saw his image in the mirror.

"'How like a prince he bears himself!' she murmured. 'My father is indeed a tyrant to deny me the pleasure of looking out upon the world and weaving sweet fancies about it. Henceforth I shall not obey him, but shall daily steal away in here, to weave in secret what he will not allow me to do openly.'

"At the same time, Hildegarde stood before her father, saying, timidly, 'Is it true, my father, what Huberta says is written in the stars? To-day when I saw Huberta's loom I pushed back the bolt which has always barred the door leading into an inner room from mine, and there I found the loom of gold and a wonderful mirror. I fain would use them as Huberta does, but I have come to ask thee first, if all be well.'

"A very tender smile lighted the face of old Hildgardmar. Taking the hand of the little Hildegarde in his, he led the way into the inner room. 'I have often looked forward to this day, my little one,' he exclaimed, 'although I did not think

thou wouldst come quite so soon with thy questions. It is indeed true, what Huberta hast told thee is written in the stars. On the right weaving of this web depends the happiness of all thy future, and not only thine but of those who may come after thee.

"'Tis a dangerous gift the good Clotho left thee, for looking in that mirror thou wilt be tempted to weave thy web to fit the shifting figures that flit therein. But listen to thy father who hath never yet deceived thee, and who has only thy good at heart. Keep always by thy side this sterling yardstick which I give thee, for it marks the inches and the ells to which the stature of a prince must measure. Not until the web doth fully equal it can it be safely taken from the loom.

"'Thou art so young, 'tis but a little mantle thou couldst weave this year, at best. Fit but to clothe the shoulders of yon curly shepherd lad.' He pointed to the bright reflection passing in the mirror. 'But 'tis a magic loom that lengthens with thy growth, and each year shall the web grow longer, until at last, a woman grown, thou canst hold it up against the yardstick, and find that it doth measure to the last inch and ell the size demanded by a prince's noble stature.

"'But thou wilt oft be dazzled by the mirror's sights, and youths will come to thee, one by one, each begging, "Give *me* the royal mantle, Hildegarde. *I* am the prince the stars have destined for thee." And with honeyed words he'll show thee how the mantle in the loom is just the length to fit *his* shoulders. But let him not persuade thee to cut it loose and give it him, as thy young fingers will be fain to do. Weave on another year, and yet another, till thou, a woman grown, canst measure out a perfect web, more ample than these stripling youths could carry, but which will fit thy prince in faultlessness, as falcon's feathers fit the falcon.'

"Hildegarde, awed by his solemn words of warning, took the silver yardstick and hung it by the mirror, and standing before old Hildgardmar with bowed head, said, 'You may trust me, father; I will not cut the golden warp from out the loom until I, a woman grown, have woven such a web as thou thyself shalt say is worthy of a prince's wearing.'

"So Hildgardmar left her with his blessing, and went back to his work. After that the winter followed the autumn and the summer the spring many times, and the children played in the garden and learned their lessons of broidery and fair needle-

work and songs upon the lute. And every day each stole away to the inner room, and threw the shuttle in and out among the threads of gold.

"Hertha worked always in secret, peering ever in the mirror, lest perchance the long-haired page in crimson clad should slip by and she not see him. For the sheen of his fair hair dazzled her to all other sights, and his face was all she thought of by day and dreamed of by night, so that she often forgot to ply her needle or finger her lute. He was only a page, but she called him prince in her thoughts until she really believed him one. When she worked at the web she sang to herself, 'It is for him — for him!'

"Huberta laughed openly about her web, and her father often teased her about the one for whom it was intended, saying, when the village lads went by, 'Is *that* thy prince?' or, 'Is it for this one thou weavest?' But he never went with her into that inner room, so he never knew whether the weaving was done well or ill. And he never knew that she cut the web of one year's weaving and gave it to the curly shepherd lad. He wore it with jaunty grace at first, and Huberta spent long hours at the mirror, watching to see him pass by all wrapped within its folds. But it grew tarnished

after awhile from his long tramps over the dirty moors after his flocks, and Huberta saw other figures in the mirror which pleased her fancy, and she began another web. And that she gave to a student in cap and gown, and the next to a troubadour strolling past her window, and the next to a knight in armour who rode by one idle summer day.

"The years went by, she scattering her favours to whomsoever called her sweetheart with vows of devotion, and Hertha faithful to the page alone. Hildegarde worked on, true to her promise. But there came a time when a face shone across her mirror so noble and fair that she started back in a flutter.

"'Oh, surely 'tis he,' she whispered to her father. 'His eyes are so blue they fill all my dreams.' But old Hildgardmar answered her, 'Does he measure up to the standard set by the sterling yardstick for a full-grown prince to be?'

"'No,' she answered, sadly. 'Only to the measure of an ordinary man. But see how perfectly the mantle I have woven would fit him!'

"'Nay, weave on, then,' he said, kindly. 'Thou hast not yet reached the best thou canst do. This is not the one written for thee in the stars.'

"A long time after a knight flashed across the mirror blue. A knight like Sir Lancelot:

> "His broad clear brow in sunlight glowed.
> On burnished hooves his war-horse trode.
> From underneath his helmet flowed,
> His coal-black curls, as on he rode
> As he rode down to Camelot."

"So noble he was that she felt sure that he was the one destined to wear her mantle, and she went to her father, saying, 'He has asked for the robe, and measured by thy own sterling yardstick, it would fit him in faultlessness, as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon.'

"Hildgardmar laid the yardstick against the web. 'Nay,' he said. 'This is only the size of a knight. It lacks a handbreadth yet of the measure of a prince.'

"Hildegarde hesitated, half-pouting, till he said, beseechingly, 'I am an old man, knowing far more of the world and its ways than thou, my daughter. Have I ever deceived thee? Have I ever had aught but thy good at heart? Have patience a little longer. Another year and thou wilt be able to fashion a still larger web.'

"At last it came to pass, as it was written in the stars, a prince came riding by to ask for Hertha

as his bride. Old Herthold, taking her by the hand, said, '*Now* I will lead thee into the inner room and teach thee how to use the fairy's sacred gift. With me for a teacher, thou canst surely make no mistake.'

"When they came into the inner room there stood only the empty loom from which the golden warp had been clipped.

"'How now!' he demanded, angrily. Hertha, braving his ill-humour, said, defiantly, 'Thou art too late. Because I feared thy scorn of what thou wast pleased to call my childish foolishness, I wove in secret, and when my prince came by, long ago I gave it him. He stands outside at the casement.'

"The astonished Herthold, turning in a rage, saw the long-haired page clad in the mantle which she had woven in secret. He tore it angrily from the youth, and demanded she should give it to the prince, who waited to claim it, but the prince would have none of it. It was of too small a fashion to fit his royal shoulders, and had been defiled by the wearing of a common page. So with one look of disdain he rode away.

"Stripped of the robe her own fancy had woven around him, the page stood shorn before her. It was as if a veil had been torn from her eyes, and

she no longer saw him as her fond dreams had painted him. She saw him in all his unworthiness; and the cloth of gold which was her maiden-love, and the rosy day-dreams she had woven into it to make the mantle of a high ideal, lay in tattered shreds at her feet. When she looked from the one to the other and saw the mistake she had made and the opportunity she had lost, she covered her face with her hands and cried out to Herthold, 'It is *thy* fault. Thou shouldst not have laughed my childish questions to scorn, and driven me to weave in ignorance and in secret.' But all her upbraiding was too late. As it was written in the stars, her heart broke, as broke the shattered mirror of the Lady of Shalott.

"That same day came a prince to Hubert, asking for his daughter. He called her from the garden, saying, gaily, 'Bring forth the mantle now, Huberta. Surely it must be a goodly one after all these years of weaving at thy own sweet will.'

"She brought it forth, but when he saw it he started back aghast at its pigmy size. When he demanded the reason, she confessed with tears that she had no more of the golden warp that was Clotho's sacred gift. She had squandered that maiden-love in the bygone years to make the mantles

she had so thoughtlessly bestowed upon the shepherd lad and the troubadour, the student and the knight. This was all she had left to give.

"'Well,' said her father, at length, 'tis only what many another has done in the wanton foolishness of youth. But perchance when the prince sees how fair thou art, and how sweetly thou dost sing to thy lute, he may overlook the paltriness of thy offering. Take it to him.'

"When she had laid it before him, he cast only one glance at it, so small it was, so meagre of gold thread, so unmeet for a true prince's wearing. Then he looked sorrowfully into the depths of her beautiful eyes and turned away.

"The gaze burned into her very soul and revealed to her all that she had lost for evermore. She cried out to her father with pitiful sobs that set his heart-strings in a quiver, 'It is *thy* fault! Why didst thou not warn me what a precious gift was the gold warp Clotho gave me! Why didst thou say to me, "Is *this* the lad? Is that the lad?" till I looked only at the village churls and wove my web to fit their unworthy shoulders, and forgot how high is the stature of a perfect prince!' Then, hiding her face, she fled away, and as it was written in the stars,

her heart broke, as broke the shattered mirror of the Lady of Shalott.

"Then came the prince to Hildegarde. All blushing and aflutter, she clipped the threads that held the golden web of her maiden-love, through which ran all her happy girlish day-dreams, and let him take it from her. Glancing shyly up, she saw that it fitted him in all faultlessness, as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon.

"Then old Hildgardmar, stretching out his hands, said, 'Because even in childhood days thou ever kept in view the sterling yardstick as I bade thee, because no single strand of all the golden warp that Clotho gave thee was squandered on another, because thou waitedst till thy woman's fingers wrought the best that lay within thy woman's heart, all happiness shall now be thine! Receive it as thy perfect crown!'

"So with her father's blessing light upon her, she rode away beside the prince; and ever after, all her life was crowned with happiness as it had been written for her in the stars."

There was a moment's silence when Mrs. Walton ceased speaking. The fire had died down until only a fitful glimmer lighted the thoughtful faces of

the girls grouped around her on the hearth-rug. Then Kitty said, impulsively:

"Of course Hertha means Ida, and you want us all to be Hildegardes, but who is Huberta?"

"Mittie Dupong, of course!" answered Allison. "And Flynn Willis and Cad Bailey and all that set we were so disgusted with at Carter Brown's party. Didn't you mean them, mother?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Walton, well pleased that the tale had been interpreted so quickly. "I must confess that I told the story solely for the moral I wanted to tack on to the end of it. You do not know how my heart has ached for Ida. Poor misguided child! From what I have heard of her aunt I think she must be like Hertha's father, and made Ida feel that she had no sympathy with her childish love-affairs. Then Ida made the mistake that Hertha did, wove her ideals in secret, and fitted them on the first boy who pleased her fancy. Once wrapped in them she was blind to all his faults, and could not judge him as other people did. She made a hero of him. I blame her aunt as much as I do her, because she did not teach her long ago, as Hildgardmar did his daughter.

"Little girls begin very early sometimes to dream about that far-away land of Romance. The teasing

questions older people ask them often set them to thinking seriously of it. They call their little playmates their sweethearts, and imagine the admiration and fondness they have for them is the love that is written in the stars. Nobody explains to them that they will outgrow their early ideals as they do their dresses.

"I can remember how my ideals used to change. When I was a little girl, about as old as Elise, I thought that my Prince Charming would be like the one in the story of the Sleeping Beauty. I dreamed of sitting all day beside him on a crystal throne, with a crown on my head and a sceptre in my hand. But as I grew older I realized how stupid that would be, and I fashioned him after the figures that flitted across my mirror in the world of books. He was as handsome as a Greek god, and the feats he performed could have been possible only in the days of the Round Table.

"Then I outgrew that ideal. Others took its place, but when a woman grown, I held up the one that was the best my woman's heart could fashion, I found that my prince measured just to the stature of an honest man, simple and earnest and true. That was all — no Greek god, no dashing

knight, but a strong, manly man, whose love was my life's crown of happiness."

She glanced up at the portrait over the mantel, and there was an impressive pause. Lloyd broke the silence presently, speaking very fast in an embarrassed sort of way.

"But, Mrs. Walton, don't you think there was some excuse for Ida besides her being blinded to Mistah Bannon's faults? He made her believe she had such a good influence ovah him that she thought it was her *duty* to disobey her aunt, because it was moah important that he should be reformed than that she should be obeyed in a mattah that seemed unreasonable to Ida."

"Yes," was the hesitating answer. "But Ida was largely influenced to take that stand by the books she had been reading. That's another matter I want to speak about, since my little girls have confessed to the reading of 'Daisy Dale' and the 'Heiress of Dorn.' While there is nothing particularly objectionable in such books in one way, in another their influence is of the very worst. The characters are either unreal or overdrawn, or they are so interestingly coloured that they are like the figures of the shepherd lad and the long-haired page in the mirrors of Hertha and Huberta. In

watching them a girl is apt to weave her web 'to fit *their* unworthy shoulders, and forget how high is the stature of a perfect prince.' Such books are poor yardsticks, and give one false ideas of value and measurement.

"Ned's plea is what nearly every wild young fellow makes, and nine times out of ten it appeals to a girl more than any other argument he could use. 'Give *me* the mantle, Hildegarde. It will help me to live right.' So she takes him in hand to reform him. Nothing could be purer and higher than the motives which prompt her to sacrifice everything to what she considers her duty. I had a schoolmate once who married a bright young fellow because he came to her with Ned's plea. Her father said, 'Let him reform first. What he will not do for a sweetheart, he will never do for a wife.' But she would not listen, and to-day she is living in abject poverty and cruel unhappiness. He is rarely sober.

"In olden times a man didn't come whining to a maiden and say, 'I long to be a knight, but I am too weak to do battle unaided. Be my ladye fair and help me win my spurs.' No, she would have laughed him to scorn. He won his spurs first, and only

after he had proved himself worthy and received his accolade, did she give him her hand.

"Oh, my dear girls, if you would *only* do as Hildegarde did, ask first if all be well before you clip the golden web from the loom and give it to the one who begs for it! He is not the one written for you in the stars — he does not measure to the stature of a true prince if he comes with such a selfish demand as Ned did."

"That is a story I'll nevah forget," said Lloyd, soberly. "I think it ought to be printed and put in the seminary library for all the othah girls to read."

"And some of the fathers and mothers, too," added Betty. "Ida's aunt ought to have a copy."

"No, it is too late," remarked Katie. "It's a case of what grandpa would call 'locking the stable after the horse is stolen.'"

There was a knock at the door. "Supper is served," announced Barbry's voice in the hall.

CHAPTER XV.

THANKSGIVING DAY

ONE might have thought, watching the pillow-fight which went on that night at bedtime, that the fairy-tale had been told too soon. The five girls, romping and shrieking through halls and bedrooms as the sport went on, fast and furious, seemed too young for its grave lessons. But "the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts," even when its actions are most childish and careless, and the little tale made a deeper impression than the teller of it realized.

For one thing, Betty laid aside the book she was writing, although she had secretly cherished the hope of having the story of Gladys and Eugene published sometime during the coming year.

"I might be ashamed of it when I am grown," she explained, quoting old Hildgardmar: "'"'Tis but a little mantle thou couldst weave this year, at best, fit but to clothe the shoulders of yon curly shepherd lad.' If I am to outgrow my ideals as I

do my dresses, I ought to wait. I want the critics to say of me 'Thou waitedst till thy woman's fingers wrought the best that lay within thy woman's heart.' So I'll lay the book aside for a few years, till I've learned more about people. But I'll write it some day."

It was that same night, while they were getting ready for bed, that the Shadow Club was disbanded.

"I nevah want to heah that name again," exclaimed Lloyd, shaking out her hair and beginning to brush it. "It was so disgraced by being dragged into the newspapahs with such a lie, that it almost makes me ill whenevah I think of it."

"Oh, you don't want to give up the work for the mountain people, do you?" asked Allison, in dismay.

"No, but I'd like to stop until aftah the holidays. We have so much to do getting ready for Christmas. Besides, I'd like to be able to tell the girls that there wasn't such a club any moah. The next term we could make a fresh start with a new name, just the five of us."

"Oh, let's call it 'The Order of Hildegarde!'" cried Betty, enthusiastically. "And all the time we are doing 'broidery and fair needlework' to sell for the mountain people, we can be trying to weave

our ideals as Hildegarde did, so that we may not miss the happiness that is written for us in the stars."

"I'd like that," exclaimed Allison, entering into the new plan eagerly. "We could have club colours this time, gold and rose, the colour of the warp and woof, you know."

"Yes, yes! That's it!" assented Kitty, with equal enthusiasm. "Streamers of narrow gold and rose ribbon, pinned by a tiny gilt star, to remind us of what is written in the stars. Don't you think that would be lovely, Katie?"

"Yes," answered Katie, "but I think if we want to keep the order a secret we oughtn't to wear such a badge in public. It would be safer to keep them in our 'inner rooms.' But we could use them in all sorts of ways, the ribbons crossed on our pincushions, or streamers of them to tie back our curtains, or broad bands on our work-baskets and embroidery-bags."

Lloyd gave ready assent. "That would suit me, for my room at home is already furnished in rose colah. All I would have to do is to add the gold and the sta'hs."

"And mine is a white and gold room," said Betty. "I'll only have to give it a few touches of rose colour."

A few more words settled the matter, as the girls hovered around the fire in their night-dresses, and then the establishment of the new Order of Hildegarde was celebrated by a pillow fight, the like of which for noise and vigour had never before been known at The Beeches.

In the hard work that followed after their return to school, time slipped by so fast that Thanksgiving Day came surprisingly soon. Nearly all the pupils and teachers went home for the short vacation, or visited friends in Louisville. Even the president and his wife went away. Only six girls besides Lloyd and Betty were left to follow the matron to church on Thanksgiving morning.

It was a lonesome walk. A Sabbath-like stillness pervaded the quiet Valley, and the ringing of the bell in the ivy-grown belfry of the little stone church, and the closed doors at the post-office, gave the girls the feeling that Sunday had somehow come in the middle of the week. As they crossed the road toward the iron gate leading into the churchyard, Lloyd looked up past the manse toward The Beeches, hoping for a glimpse of the Walton girls. Then she remembered that Allison had told her that they were all going to town to celebrate the day with her Aunt Elise, and the feeling of being left out of

everybody's good times began to weigh heavily upon her.

No smoke was coming out of any of the chimneys, either at The Beeches or Edgewood. When she thought of Locust, also cold and empty, with no fire on its hospitable hearths, no feast on its ample table, no cheer anywhere within its walls, and her family far away, a wave of homesickness swept over her that brought a mist over her eyes. She could scarcely see as they went up the steps.

Mrs. Bond, with her usual dread of being late, had hurried them away from the seminary much too soon. Not more than half a dozen carriages had driven into the grove around the little country church when they reached the door, and only a few people were waiting inside. As Lloyd sat in the solemn silence that was broken only now and then by a stifled cough or the rustle of a turning leaf, she had hard work to battle back the tears. But with a sudden determination to overcome such a feeling, she sat up very straight in the end of the pew, and pressed her lips together hard.

"It's almost wicked of me," she thought, "to feel so bad about the one thing I can't have when there are a thousand other things that ought to make me happy. It's only a pah't of my bo'ding-

school experiences, and will be ovah in a little while. I don't suppose anybody in church has moah to be thankful for than I have."

She glanced furtively across the aisle. "I'm thankful that I'm not that old Mistah Saxon with his wooden leg, or that poah little Mrs. Crisp in the cawnah, with five children to suppo't, and one of them a baby that has fits."

Her gaze wandered down the opposite aisle. "And I'm suah it's something to be thankful for not to have a nose like Libbie Simms, or such a fussy old fathah as Sue Bell Wade has to put up with. And I'm glad I haven't such poah taste as to make a rainbow out of myself, wearing so many different colahs at once as Miss McGill does. Five different shades of red on the same hat are enough to set one's teeth on edge. I believe I could go on all day, counting the things I'm glad I haven't got; and as for the things I have — " She began checking them off on her finger-tips. There was a handful before she had fairly begun to count; home, family, perfect health, the love of many friends, the opportunities that filled every day to the brim.

The organist pulled out the stops and began playing an old familiar chant as a voluntary. As the

full, sweet chords filled the church Lloyd could almost hear the words rising with the music:

> "My cup runneth over.
> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
> All the days of my life."

As the music swelled louder, her counting was interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of several generations of the Moore family, who had come back to Oaklea for a Thanksgiving reunion. It seemed good to Lloyd to see the old judge's white head gleaming like silver in its accustomed pew. His benign face fairly radiated cheerfulness and good-will as he took his place once more among his old neighbours.

Rob walked just behind him, so tall and erect, it seemed to Lloyd that he must have grown several inches in the three short months since they had cut the last notches in the measuring-tree. As he turned to throw his overcoat across the back of the seat, his quick glance spied Lloyd and Betty several pews in the rear, and he flashed them a smile of greeting. At the same time, so quickly and deftly that Mrs. Bond did not see the motion, he held up a package that he had carried in under his overcoat, and instantly dropped it out of sight

again on the seat. Then he straightened himself up beside his grandfather, as if he were a model of decorum.

Lloyd and Betty exchanged a meaning glance which seemed to say, "That five-pound box of Huyler's best he promised us;" and Lloyd found herself wondering several times during the long service how he would manage to present it. That problem did not worry Rob, however. As the congregation slowly moved down the aisles and out into the vestibule, he elbowed his way to Mrs. Bond, standing beside her eight charges like a motherly old hen.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bond," he exclaimed, in his straightforward, boyish way. "You're going to take me under your wing and let me walk to the gate with Betty and Lloyd, aren't you! I'll be as good as grandfather if you will, and I'll even take him along if it's necessary to have anybody to vouch for me."

His mischievous smile was so irresistible that she gave him a motherly pat on the shoulder. "Run along," she exclaimed, laughingly. "I'll follow presently. There are several people I want to speak to first."

"Oh, Rob," exclaimed Lloyd, as he started down

the avenue beside her and Betty. "It's like a bit of home to see you again. Talk fast and tell us everything. Do you think you'll pass in Latin? Is it decided whethah you're to go East to school aftah Christmas? Did you see that awful piece in the papah about our club?"

She poured out her questions so rapidly that they were half-way to the seminary before he could answer all her catechism, and then he had so many to ask her that she almost forgot to tell him about the box they had received from Locust that morning.

"A suah enough Thanksgiving-box!" she exclaimed gleefully. "Just as if we'd really been away off from home at school, with all the good things that Mom Beck could think of or Aunt Cindy could cook, from a turkey to a monstrous big fruit-cake. Mothah planned the surprise before she went away. Think of the gay midnight suppahs we could have if we hadn't turned ovah a new leaf and refawmed."

"So you've reformed!" he repeated. "Then boarding-school life can't seem as funny to you as you thought last September it was going to be."

"Yes, it does," protested Betty. "I'll be glad when the next four weeks are over so that we can go back to Locust, but excepting only two or three

things that happened, I've enjoyed every minute that we've been at the seminary. I'll always be glad that we had this experience."

"And it wasn't at all like you said it would be," added Lloyd, laughingly, "'scorched oatmeal and dried apples and old cats watching at every key-hole.' There was some eavesdropping, but it wasn't the teachahs who did it, and we had moah fun getting even with the girl who did than I could tell in a week. I'll tell you about our playing ghost, and all the rest, when you come out Christmas."

"Then I'll have to hand over the candy," he said. "You've earned it, if you've stood the strain this long and kept as hale and hearty as you look."

They had reached the high green picket gate by this time, and, delivering the box to the girls, with a few more words he left them. Dinner was to be early at Oaklea, he said, as they were all going home on the five o'clock train.

"Oh, it was just like having a piece of home to see him again," exclaimed Lloyd, looking after him wistfully as he lifted his cap and walked rapidly away. "I can hardly wait to get back now. Wouldn't you like to walk up to Locust aftah dinnah, Betty?"

"No, I believe not," was the hesitating reply.

"It would make me feel more homesick than if I stayed away altogether. Mom Beck will be off keeping holiday somewhere, and everything will be shut up and desolate-looking. Probably all we'd see would be Lad and Tarbaby out in the pasture. Let's walk over to Rollington instead, after dinner, and take a lot of things to that poor little Mrs. Crisp out of our box from home."

"How funny for you to think of the same thing that I did this mawning in church!" exclaimed Lloyd. "The text made me think of it, and when I looked across at her in that pitiful old wispy crape veil, and thought of the washing she has to do, and the baby with the fits, I was so thankful that I was not in her place that I felt as if I ought to give her every penny I possess."

It was a very quiet day. A better dinner than usual, and the long walk over to Rollington late in the afternoon was all that made it differ from the Sundays that they had spent at the seminary. But as the two little Good Samaritans trudged homeward over the frozen pike, swinging their empty basket between them, Lloyd exclaimed, "I've had a good time to-day, aftah all, and I would have been perfectly misah'ble if I'd gone on the way I stah'ted out to do — thinking about the one thing I wanted

and couldn't have. I just *made* myself stop, and go to thinking of the things I did have, and then I forgot to feel homesick. Counting yoah blessings and carrying turkey to poah folks doesn't sound like a very exciting way to spend yoah holidays, but it makes you feel mighty good inside, doesn't it! Especially when you think how pleased Mrs. Crisp was."

"Yes," answered Betty. "I don't know how to express the way the day has made me feel. Not happy, exactly, for when I'm that way I always want to sing." She held her muff against her cold face. "It's more like a big, soft, furry kind of contentment. If I were a cat I'd be purring."

CHAPTER XVI.

CHRISTMAS GREENS AND WATCH-NIGHT EMBERS

THERE is a chapter in Betty's Good Times book which tells all about that last day at the seminary, before the Christmas vacation; of the hurried packing and leave-taking; of her trip to town with Lloyd to meet Papa Jack and come out home with him on the five o'clock train, laden with Christmas packages like all the other suburban passengers; of the carriage waiting for them at the depot, just as if they had been away at some school a long distance from the Valley, and then the crowning joy of seeing her godmother on the platform, waving her handkerchief as the train stopped in front of the depot.

They had not expected her back from Hot Springs until the next day, and all the way out on the train had been discussing the reception they intended to give her. There had been a twinkle in Mr. Sherman's eyes as he listened, for he knew of this surprise in store for them, and had had a hand in planning it.

It is all in Betty's Good Times book, even to the way they rolled down the steps and fell over each other in their haste to reach her, and the welcome that made it seem more than ever as if they were coming home from a long journey to spend their Christmas vacation, just as thousands of other schoolgirls were doing all over the country. Then the drive homeward in the frosty, starlit dusk to find Locust all atwinkle, a light in every window and a fire on every hearth; the great front door swinging wide on its hospitable hinges to send a stream of light down the avenue to meet them, and the spirit of Christmas cheer and expectancy falling warm upon them as they crossed the threshold.

The memory of it would be something to be glad for always, Betty thought, as she danced into the long drawing-room after Lloyd, and saw the old Colonel start up from his chair before the fire and come forward to meet them, the candle-light falling softly on his silver hair and smiling face.

Although Betty had laid aside her unfinished romance of Gladys and Eugene, she could no more help writing than a fish can keep from swimming, and that is why her Good Times book held so many interesting pages. All the energy and time that would have been put into the silly little novel went

instead to the description of real scenes and real people, which in after years made the little white books the most precious volumes in all her library. As fast as one was filled she began another. The one now on her desk had the number IV. stamped in gold on the white kid cover, under her initials.

There were few pages in this fourth volume more interesting than the ones she found time to write on Christmas Eve. She had gone with Lloyd and Allison and Kitty that afternoon in search for Christmas greens with which to decorate the house.

Malcolm and Keith MacIntyre, Rob Moore, and Ranald Walton had met them in Tanglewood, their guns over their shoulders, and had joined them in their quest. The mistletoe they wanted grew too high to be climbed for or to be dislodged by throwing at, but Ranald, an expert marksman, volunteered to shoot down all they could carry. He was just home from military school on his vacation, and Rob Moore had been out for two days hunting with him. Malcolm and Keith had been at their grandmother's several days, tramping long distances over the frosty fields, and coming in well satisfied each evening with the contents of their game-bags.

Malcolm and Rob were to leave for the same college-preparatory school after the holidays, and as

they were going back to town on the five o'clock train they had but a short time left to spend in the Valley. So the party, after some discussion, divided into three groups, agreeing to meet at the depot.

Ranald strode away across the woods as fast as his long legs would carry him to the trees where the mistletoe hung. Kitty and Katie kept close in his wake, swinging the baskets between them that he was to fill. Keith and Betty hurried on to the place where the bittersweet grew thickest, while Rob and Allison, Malcolm and Lloyd strolled along, filling their baskets from the occasional trees of hemlock, spruce, and cedar they found on their way among the bare oaks and beeches. Now and then they found a pine with the brown cones clinging to the spicy boughs.

Only Betty's part of that quest is in the little white record; how they ran along through Tanglewood that afternoon, she and Keith, in the late December sunshine, breathing in the woodsy odour of the fallen leaves and the crisp frostiness of the air, until the blood tingled in their finger-tips and their cheeks grew red as rosy apples.

It was a pretty picture she left on the page, of the winter woods, of the old stile leading into the adjoining churchyard, where in almost a thicket

of bare dogwood-trees and lilac-bushes stood the little Episcopal church, built like the one next the manse, of picturesque gray stone. The walls were aglow with the brilliant red and orange berries of the bittersweet, which hung even from the eaves and cornices, and from every place where the graceful vines could trail and twist and clamber.

Lloyd kept no record of that afternoon, but she never forgot it. She walked along, her eyes shining like stars, her cheeks glowing. Her dark blue cap and jacket made her hair seem all the fairer by contrast, and there was a glint of gold in it, wherever the sun touched it through the trees.

Rob and Malcolm were full of their plans for the coming term, and talked of little else all the way through the woods, but as they reached the stile, over which Keith and Betty had passed some time before, Rob exclaimed:

"I forgot to tell you, Lloyd! When we were out hunting yesterday we stopped at a cabin ever so far from here, to rest and warm. And what do you suppose we saw on the pendulum of an old clock, swinging away on the mantel as big as life? *Your picture!* The one of the Princess, you know, with the dove. I couldn't believe my eyes at first. The old man told us it had been given to his daughter,

and when he found out who Ranald was he sent a message to Mrs. Walton about her. She's in a hospital and will soon be well enough to come home. Mrs. Walton told us all about it last night, how the girl imagined every time the clock ticked that you were saying, 'For love will find the way.' It made quite a pretty story, but you can't imagine how queer it was to stumble across your picture in such an out-of-the-way place, and fixed up in such odd shape, on a pendulum, of all things!"

"It helped Corono ever so much, mother said," remarked Allison. "That's one good thing our Shadow Club led to, if nothing else." She climbed up on the stile and stood looking over, exclaiming at the beauty of the old gray walls, draped in the masses of brilliant bittersweet; then, springing down, ran across the churchyard to join Betty and Keith on the other side and make her own selection of vines.

Rob leaned his gun against the fence and took out his watch. "Only half an hour longer," he announced. Then, opening the back of his watch-case, he held it out toward Lloyd.

"Do you remember that?" he asked, nodding toward a little four-leaf clover which lay flat and green inside. "Your good-luck charm worked

wonders, Lloyd. It helped me through my Latin in such fine shape that I intend to carry it through college with me all the way. It's like the picture on the pendulum, isn't it? only this says, 'For *luck* will find the way.'"

As Lloyd began some laughing reply about his being superstitious, Betty's voice called from the vestry door, "Oh, Rob! Come around here a minute, please! Here's the loveliest bunch of berries you ever saw, and it's too high for any one but you to reach!"

With one leap Rob was over the stile hurrying to Betty's assistance. Lloyd had filled both pockets of her jacket with hickory-nuts on her way through Tanglewood, and, seating herself on the top step of the stile, she began cracking them with a round stone which she had picked up near the fence. Malcolm, leaning on his gun, stood watching her.

"You never gave *me* any four-leaf clover, Lloyd," he said, in a low tone, as Rob strode away.

"You nevah happened to be around when I found any," answered Lloyd, carelessly. "Have a nut instead." She nodded toward the pile on the step beside her.

Malcolm flushed a trifle. He was nearly sixteen, tall and broad-shouldered, but the colour came as

easily to his handsome face now as when a little fellow of ten he had begged her to keep his silver arrow "to remember him by."

"No, thanks," he answered, stiffly. There was a jealous note in his voice as he added, "And you wouldn't let me keep the little heart of gold that night after the play."

"Of co'se not! Papa Jack gave me that. I think everything of it."

"You wouldn't even lend it to me," he continued.

"Because we'd come to the end of the play. You were not Sir Feal any longah, and you didn't have any shield to bind it on, so what good would it have done?"

"But we haven't come to the end of the play," he insisted. "I've thought of you ever since as my Princess Winsome, and it has been more than a year since that night. Yesterday, when I saw your picture on the pendulum, and heard how it had influenced that girl in the cabin, I wished that I could make you understand how much more your influence means to me; and I made up my mind to ask you for something. Will you give it to me, Lloyd? It's just the tip of that little curl behind your ear. It shines like gold, and I want to put it in the back of my watch as a talisman, like they used to carry

in old times, you know — a token that I am your knight, and that I may do as it says in the song, come back to you 'on some glad morrow.' I want to carry it with me always, as I shall always carry your shadow-self wherever I go."

Lloyd bent her head so far over the nuts as she chose one with great deliberation that her hair fell across the cheek nearest him, and he could not see how red her face grew. How handsome he was, she thought. How deep and clear his eyes looked as they smiled into hers. If she had never known of Ida's mistake — if she had never heard the Hildegarde story — there might have crept into her girlish fancy, young though she was, the thought that this was the love written for her in the stars. But like a flash came the recollection of old Hildgardmar's warning:

"And many youths will come to thee, each begging, 'Give me the royal mantle, Hildegarde. I am the prince the stars have destined for thee!'"

And then his words of blessing:

"Because even in childhood days thou ever kept in view the sterling yardstick as I bade thee, because no single strand of all the golden warp that Clotho gave thee was squandered on another, because thou waitedst till thy woman's fingers wrought the best

that lay within thy woman's heart, all happiness shall now be thine."

"Please, Lloyd," he asked again, in a low, earnest tone.

"I — I can't, Malcolm," she stammered, giving the nut she had chosen a sudden blow that completely smashed it.

"Why not? You gave Rob the clover to carry in *his* watch."

"That was different. Rob doesn't care for the clovah on my account. He carries it for the good luck it brings; not because I gave it to him."

"But he'll get to caring after awhile," said Malcolm, moodily. "He couldn't help it. Nobody could who knew you, and I don't want him to." Then, after a long pause in which Lloyd attended so strictly to her nut-cracking that she did not even glance in his direction, he asked, jealously: "Would you give *him* the curl if he asked for it?"

Something in his tone made Lloyd look up with a provoking little smile. "No," she answered, "not even the snippiest little snip of a hair, if he asked for it the way you are doing, and wanted it to mean what you do — that he was my — my chosen knight, you know."

"Is there *anybody* you would give it to, Lloyd?"

His persistence only made her shake her head the more obstinately. It did not take much teasing to arouse what Mom Beck called "the Lloyd stubbo'-ness."

"No! I tell you! And if you keep on talking that way I'm going home!"

"Why won't you let me talk that way? This is the last time I'll see you until next summer, and I'm dreadfully in earnest, Lloyd. You don't know how much it means to me. Don't you care for me at all?"

A dozen things came crowding up to her lips in answer. She wanted to tell him the story of Hildegarde's weaving and old Hildgardmar's warning. She wanted to say that she could not trifle with the happiness that was written for her in the stars by giving away even a strand of Clotho's golden thread before she was old enough to choose wisely the one on whom to bestow such a favour. But she knew that he would not understand these allusions to a story of which he had never heard.

She did not know how to put into words the vague, undefined feeling that she had, that he must not come to her with such speeches until he had won his spurs and received his accolade. It was her helplessness to answer as she wished that made her

spring up impatiently and say in her most imperious, Little Colonel-like way, "Didn't you heah me tell you to stop talking that way, Malcolm MacIntyre? Of co'se I care for you. I've always liked you, and I think you're one of the nicest boys I know, but I won't if you keep on that way when I tell you to stop. You might at least wait till you come back from college and let me see what sawt of a man you've turned out to be!"

"I'll be whatever you want me to be, Lloyd," he began, but just then the mistletoe gatherers came running down the path toward them, and Ranald's whistle brought the others from the churchyard with their bittersweet. Lloyd flung away her nut-shells, and standing on the top of the stile brushed her dress with her handkerchief. Malcolm, swinging his gun to his shoulder, picked up her basket and walked beside her in conscious silence, as the merry party strolled on toward the depot.

Several times she glanced up shyly at him, saying to herself again that he was certainly one of the nicest boys she knew, the most courteous, the most attractive, with the same beauty of face and polish of manner that had made him such a winning little Knight of Kentucky. But the little pin he had worn as the badge of that knighthood, that

stood for the "wearing the white flower of a blameless life," was no longer on the lapel of his coat. He had laid it aside more than a year ago, saying that he had outgrown that child's play, and that it was impossible for a fellow of his age to live up to it.

As Lloyd noticed its absence she was glad that she had answered him as she did. But almost with the same breath came the recollection that he had said, "I'll be whatever you want me to be, Lloyd," and she wondered with a quicker heart-throb if it were really so that she had power to wield such an influence over him, and she wondered also, if she had given him the curl as he asked, and told him that she wanted him to wear the white flower again and live up to its meaning, if he would have done it for her sake.

Keith rushed on ahead to see if the man had brought their suit-cases down to the waiting-room, and the others crossed over to the store for some hot pop-corn. There were several holly wreaths hanging in the window, and although Lloyd knew that a number of them had already been sent out to Locust from town, she could not resist the temptation of buying the largest one there, it was so unusually bright and full of berries. They had barely

reached the waiting-room again when the train came thundering along the track.

With hasty good-byes the three boys hurried up the steps. Keith and Rob hung on to the railing on the platform of the rear car, swinging their caps and calling back various messages about Christmas and next week and after the holidays, but Malcolm, after one long look into the Little Colonel's eyes, turned and went into the car. He wanted to carry away with him undisturbed the picture she made as she stood there on the platform, waving her handkerchief. She was all in dark blue, her fair hair blowing in the wind, her cheeks a delicate wild rose pink. At her feet was the basket of Christmas greens, and on her arm hung the glowing wreath of Christmas holly.

It was the last night of the old year. Watch-night, Mom Beck called it, and as soon as dinner was over she and Aunt Cindy and Alec hurried away to Brier Creek Church, where the coloured people were to hold services till midnight, watching the old year out and the new year in.

It had been a busy week for Lloyd and Betty. The happiest of Christmas Days had been followed by neighbourhood parties, entertainments, and

merrymakings of all descriptions. The old Southern mansion rang with many gay young voices, and overflowed with life, for there were guests within its hospitable gates from morning until night.

But now a lull had come in the festivities. The last guest had departed on the evening train, and ten o'clock found the house strangely still. The servants were all out. Betty, locked in her room, busy with embroidery silks, was finishing a little New Year's gift with which to surprise her god-mother on the morrow. Mrs. Sherman had gone up-stairs to sit with the old Colonel awhile. She had not been able to give him much of her time since their return to Locust, and to-night, with the waning year, he seemed to want her to himself to talk to him of his "long, long ago," and listen to his tales of old days which grew dearer with each passing holiday season.

Only Lloyd and her father were left in the long drawing-room. She had begged to be allowed to keep Watch-night with him.

"It's only two houahs moah, mothah," she said, beseechingly. "I'll sleep late in the mawning to make up for it. I've scarcely seen Papa Jack since we came home, and he's going away so soon again.

Besides, I nevah did sit up to watch a new yeah come in."

So she had her way, and, sitting on a low stool at his feet, with his hand softly stroking her hair, they talked of many things.

He began in a teasing, playful way, "You haven't told me what you learned at boarding-school, Little Colonel. You must have absorbed a vast amount of knowledge, when even your nights were passed in such a learned institution."

The face she turned toward him was a very serious one, for the time had come for confession. Yet after all confession did not seem as hard as she had thought it would be. The very touch of his hand on her hair made it easier, it was so kind and sympathetic. She had always gone to him with all her childish troubles as freely as she had to her mother. Presently she had poured out the whole story, her part in the clandestine correspondence, Edwardo's coming to Locust, her struggle in that very room to be loyal to the family honour and her father's trust in her.

Allison's Christmas present to her had been an autograph copy of the story of "The Three Weavers." It was bound in water-colour paper, tied in the rose and gold ribbons of the Order, and

bore on the cover a design of Allison's own painting, a filmy spider-web held by a row of golden stars. Lloyd showed it to him as she told of the forming of the Order of Hildegarde to take the place of the old Shadow Club, and then, spreading the book open across his knee, read it aloud — the little tale which was destined to play such an important part in her life, and which already had influenced her far more than she was aware.

When she had finished she sat idly turning the leaves and gazing into the fire. "You see," she said, presently, "this is a story for fathahs and mothahs, too, and — and — I want you to give me my yah'dstick, Papa Jack."

As she glanced up at him with a roguish smile dimpling her face, she was astonished to see tears in his eyes. He had been very silent while she read the story.

"My precious little Hildegarde!" he exclaimed, drawing her to his knee and folding his arms around her. She laid her head on his shoulder, and he began: "I don't suppose you can understand how I feel about it, Lloyd. It breaks me all up to think that my Little Colonel is near enough grown to come to me with such a request. If I could have my way I would be selfish enough to want to keep

you a little girl always. I hate to think that a time can ever come when any one may ask to take you from me. But, Lloyd darling, it takes all the sting out of that thought to know that you are willing to come to me so freely with your questions — to know that there is such perfect confidence between us that you do not feel the embarrassment that most girls feel in talking with their fathers on such a subject. Let me think a moment, for I want to answer as wisely as old Hildgardmar did, if that be possible."

It was a long time before he spoke again. Then he said, slowly, "There are only three notches on the yardstick which I am going to give you, Lloyd. The prince who comes asking for you must have, first, a clean life. There must be no wild oats sowed through its past for my little girl to help reap, for no man ever gathers such a harvest alone. Next, he must be honourable in every way which that good old word implies. The man who is that will not ask anything clandestine, nor will he ask to take you from a comfortable home before he is able to provide one for you himself. Then, if he would measure up to the third notch, he must be strong. Strong in character, in purpose, and endeavour. There are many things that I might ask for my

only child, many things that I would gladly choose for her if the choice were left to me: family, position, wealth — but they are nothing when weighed in the balance with the love of an honest man. If his life be clean and honourable and strong, then choose as you will, my blessing shall go with you!"

Instantly there flashed into Lloyd's thoughts the recollection of a boyish figure standing beside the old stile, and she wondered how far he would measure up to that standard. Clean in life and habit? He had always seemed so, but a little doubt disturbed her as she thought of the white flower he no longer wore, and what he had said about it. Strong in purpose and in effort? It was too soon to tell. He was only a boy with all his uncertain future before him, with all the temptations of his college days still unmet and unconquered.

As she felt her father's protecting arm around her, she nestled closer in that safe, sure shelter, and sat considering what he had said. Once she glanced up at the portrait over the mantel, and met the gaze of the beautiful eyes of the young girl beside the harp — Amanthis, who had made no mistake in her choosing, whose girlish romance had bloomed as sweetly as the June roses that she wore.

Presently Lloyd's arm stole up around her father's

neck, and she softly repeated the words of Hildegarde's promise:

"'*You may trust me, fathah. I will not cut the golden warp from out the loom until I, a woman grown, have woven such a web as thou thyself shalt say is worthy of a prince's wearing!*'"

"Dear child," he answered, huskily, "you have crowned not only this year for me, but all the years, with that promise. God grant that you may find all happiness written for you in His stars!"

The candles were burning low in their silver sconces now. The fire on the hearth was only a mass of glowing embers, and as the clock ticked on toward midnight, they sat in happy silence, awaiting the dawn of the untried new year.

THE END.

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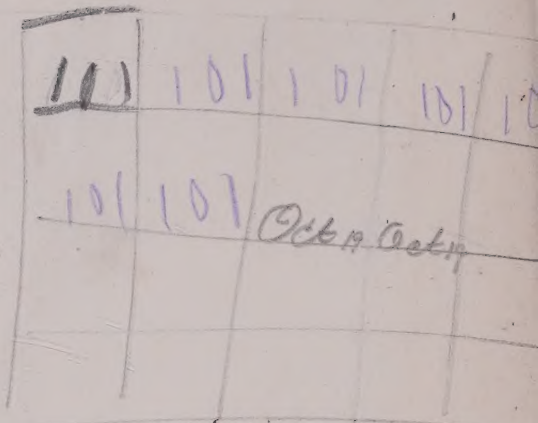

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